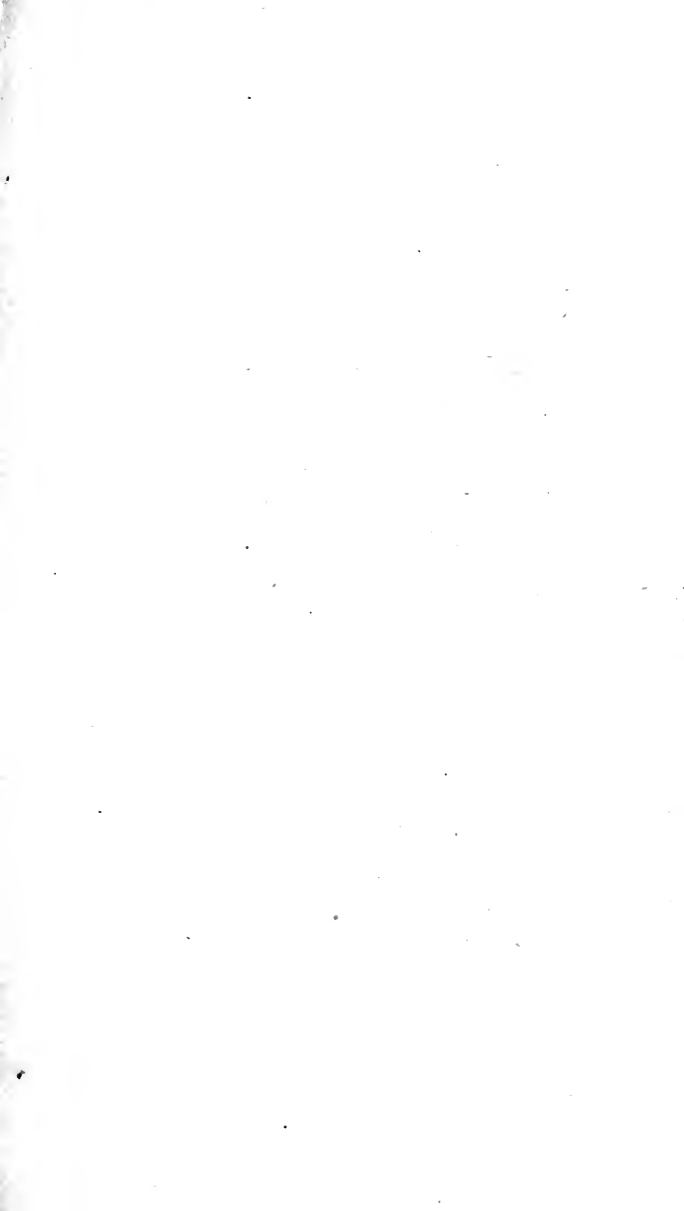


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LETTERS
ON
LITERATURE.
TASTE,
AND
COMPOSITION,

ADDRESSED TO HIS SON,

BY GEORGE GREGORY, D. D.

LATE VICAR OF WEST-HAM, DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO
THE BISHOP OF LLANDAFF, &c. &c. &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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PREFACE.

THE following Work is presented to the public as the last literary composition which its well known Author lived to complete; and it contains the result of various observations, made by a vigorous and cultivated mind, upon different subjects of taste and literature. It was concluded a very short time previous to his decease; it assisted in cheering and engaging his mind, in soothing the languor of declining health, and in recalling the delightful remembrance of former associates, and of a long course of intellectual pursuits. To his friends these circumstances will render the Work additionally valuable. They will, from the natural and best feelings of the human heart,

cherish the relic which reminds them of those hours of social conversation when subjects of literature were discussed; when they were illuminated by his scientific and enlightened mind, or exhilarated by his innocent and undissembled cheerfulness. The public, we trust, will receive the Work as the last performance of an Author whom they have long approved, of one whose life was uniformly devoted to their, and his own, best interests: those of science, and literature; of religion, and virtue.

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LETTERS
ON
LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION.

LETTER I.

*Introduction.—Principle of Association.—
Pleasures from the fine Arts.*

MY DEAR JOHN,

WE live in an age when almost every thing is artificial. When not only rules are proposed for the performance of almost every action connected with social life, but when the grounds and principles on which those rules are founded constitute an object of anxious inquiry. Men have long agreed in regarding some things as pleasing; but not satisfied with this, we are led to inquire whence they have derived their power to please, and on what principle in human nature it is that certain appearances, sounds or ideas are delightful to the human mind.

The pleasure which is imparted by the fine arts, and their power over the mind, are founded upon certain principles. We have not yet indeed been enabled to mount to the source whence their controul over the passions is derived ; but by observing carefully certain effects, we can generally foretel when these effects will be produced. Music is perhaps the simplest of all the fine arts : its power is derived entirely from the influence of certain sounds upon the organs of perception. It is impossible to say why some sounds or combinations of sound should be termed pathetic ; why some should excite hilarity ; why some should be adapted to the passion of love, and why others should be assimilated to joy and triumph ; yet so it is, and there is scarcely an ear so insensible to harmony as not to have proved the force of music on one occasion or another. These effects upon the ear have been compared, and perhaps not without reason, to certain impressions produced upon our other senses.

“ That strain again ;—it had a dying fall,
O, it came o’er my ear like the sweet south,
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing, and giving odour.”

SHAKS.

To the eye some appearances, and even some colours, are productive of pleasure. It is extremely difficult to analyze the sensation, and to account for the pleasing effect of some flowers more than others; it depends upon the combination and arrangement of colours; upon the regular disposition of the petals; upon some unknown circumstance even independent of the principle of association, something as unconnected with ideas of social pleasure or pain, as the vibrations of an *Æolian* harp.

I find I have casually mentioned the word association, and it is necessary perhaps to enter upon a short explanation of it, since those pleasurable sensations, which may properly be called mental, and consequently those which are derived from the reading of poetry, or the beauties of composition in general, are not simple but complex sensations; derived, at least in part, from certain associations which the mind has formed with other objects.

It is exceedingly obvious that two or more sensations happening at the same time, the ideas will become united. Thus the ideas of the figure and colour of bodies admitted by the eye are always combined, and these may be still as-

sociated with another idea admitted by means of the touch. Thus the idea, or picture formed in the mind of any object, is complex, or composed of several ideas united : of figure, colour, and perhaps softness or hardness also. If music is heard while we behold the instrument, the sound will be associated with the visible appearance, and the former will recal the idea of the latter, even when we do not see the instrument. Names are associated with things, and things with actions.

On this principle of association depends the necessary succession of ideas in a train, of which any one may satisfy himself by attending to the operations of his own mind : ideas are introduced by an agreement in some of the parts of which complex ideas are composed. Shakespeare, describing a merchant's fears, says,

“ My wind, cooling my broth,
“ Would blow me to an ague, when I thought
“ What harm a wind too great might do at sea.
“ I should not see the sandy hour-glass run,
“ But I should think of shallows and of flats;
“ And see my wealthy Arg'sie dock'd in sand.
“ Should I go to church,
“ And see the ho'y edifice of stone,
“ And not bethink me strait of dangerous rocks?”

The association and train of ideas is perhaps still more pleasantly illustrated by a story related by Hobbes. "In a discourse on our present civil war (that in the reign of Charles I.), what," says he, "could seem more impertinent than to ask, as one did, the value of a Roman penny. Yet the coherence was to me sufficiently manifest. The thought of the war introduced the thought of the delivering up of the king to his enemies; the thought of that brought in the thought of the delivering up of Christ; and that again the thought of the thirty pence which was the price of that treason; and thence easily followed that malicious question, and all that in an instant of time; for thought is quick."

I hope sufficient has been said to make you acquainted with what is meant by the association and train of ideas; and what may appear a digression is in reality more connected with our subject than at first sight may appear. For much of the pleasure derived from the fine arts, and particularly from poetry and oratory, may be resolved, in part at least, into the principle of association. Many of the human passions are chiefly, if not entirely, derived from

it. Thus patriotism, or the strong attachment which almost every person feels for his country, is in a manner created from the pleasurable sensations derived in our earliest youth from the enjoyments we have found there. The sight of the place where we have been happy always revives in us a placid, perhaps a melancholy idea of pleasure.

But it is not necessary in a course of letters on rhetoric and criticism, to enter deeply into the philosophy of the human mind, of which, after all, but little is known; and my wish is rather to make these letters practical than speculative. The pleasures afforded by the fine arts, music, painting, and poetry, have been termed "the pleasures of the imagination,"³³ in contradiction to the sensual pleasures, though I confess music appears to approach very near to a mere pleasure of the sense; and it is perhaps from its connexion with poetry, or rather from its subservience to it, that it has been classed among the superior arts, or those which administer pleasure to the mind.

The pleasures of the imagination are almost all in a considerable degree the result of association. If it was possible to present a finely

pictured landscape to a person who had never seen a natural landscape, one who had been born blind, and who was recently couched for instance, I much doubt whether he would derive from it any other pleasure than that which its novelty would afford. I question whether the harmony of the colouring, so much spoken of by painters, or the light and shade, would afford any peculiar pleasure. It is the recollection that is revived of the beauties of nature, of the happiness we have enjoyed in similar scenes, or possibly of that which we have heard described as flowing from them, and perhaps an admiration of the excellence of the imitation, that principally inspire us with pleasurable sensations on such an occasion.

Hence the fine arts, and particularly painting, sculpture, and poetry, have been termed the "imitative arts," because their chief excellence depends upon their being an imitation or description of whatever is beautiful or striking in nature.

To apply all this to the immediate object of our correspondence. Nothing is more obvious than that some books are more pleasing than others; some forcibly occupy our attention,

while some inevitably tire and disgust. It is very easy to see why a narrative or description, a fine history or a well-told fiction, a tragedy or a romance should interest. It is because it affords us a picture of ourselves, or of something in which our passions are naturally engaged. But why one composition should be even more pleasing in its manner than another, why the style and language of an author should particularly interest us, is a more curious inquiry, and more remote from common observation.

Should we be able to satisfy ourselves upon this subject, it is probable that even a practical benefit might result from it, since a person who is acquainted with the sources whence those materials are derived which render a composition pleasing, will be better able to avail himself of them than one who writes at random, and without any knowledge of his art.

I am not one of those who affect to "write dull receipts how poems should be made." I know that the most intense study will not give what is called genius, or imagination, or fancy; but still I must assert that every intellectual endowment may be improved. I must assert that writing, as far as chasteness, correctness,

elegance, and fluency are concerned, is as much an art as any other ; that it is in a great measure acquired by practice and study, by an imitation of the best models, and by occasionally referring even to principles and rules.

That this is an undoubted truth must be confessed by any person who observes how much more numerous good, or at least tolerable writers, are at present in this country than they were two centuries ago. Nature must create a Shakspeare, a Milton, a Pope, a Swift, an Addison, a Johnson or a Gibbon. These were men possessed of most powerful imaginations, most pregnant fancies ; but it is chiefly art which produces the many smooth and elegant writers who flourish at all times in the inferior walks of literature. I knew a very old gentleman of considerable talent who used to say, that in his youth it was a distinction to write well ; but that now even the essays in the common newspapers were composed in a correct and agreeable style.

What I have now observed ought not to lessen the value of this accomplishment of writing well in your opinion. The more general it is, the more indispensable it becomes. To

be able to maintain an epistolary correspondence, with elegance and spirit, is now an essential qualification in the character of every gentleman, I had almost said of every lady. Besides, that all public speaking, in whatever line, is a species of composition, and he will certainly be the most successful who, if possessed of equal talents with his competitors, has made himself well acquainted with the rules and principles of eloquence.

LETTER II.

Style.

MY DEAR JOHN,

MY last letter concluded with recommending an inquiry why the style of one author should be more pleasing and interesting than that of another. If instruction was the sole end of reading, that style which conveyed knowledge in the simplest terms, with the greatest clearness and correctness, would be preferable to every other. This style has indeed its value, and even its beauty; and in books of mere science ought to be preferred to every other. I shall have in future to make some observations on this subject, when I treat more particularly of the different kinds of composition; but this is not our present object. We are now considering the source of that pleasure which is derivable from the mere style, manner, or language of a literary production.

Authors have distinguished between the dif-

ferent styles; and a grand division is into the plain, such as I have just now described, and the ornamented. I apprehend it is chiefly the ornamented that contributes to the mere pleasure of a reader. You cannot be at a loss to know what I mean by an ornamented style; it is that in which lively description, similies, allusions, metaphors, and the other figures of rhetoric abound.

Poetry always interests a reader of taste more than prose. The causes of this are the harmony arising from the metre or the rhyme, and which (without entering into a metaphysical inquiry as to the cause) may be referred to the same source as the pleasure which music affords. The other circumstance which renders poetry pleasing is the animated and figurative language, which is one of its characteristics.

We may, I think, easily explain why the style of one literary work is more pleasing than that of another, upon the very same principles that the matter of one is more interesting than that of another. I observed that histories of great events, tragedies, or ingenious fictions of human actions and events, always interest more than any other literary productions, and the

reason is, that they contain something that immediately comes within the sphere of self, and engages, and by an associated action excites our passions.

It is of but little consequence whether the subject is fiction or reality. Robinson Crusoe, George Barnwell, and even Don Quixote, not to speak of the incomparable novel of Cecilia, interest, I will venture to say, more than Livy or than Hume. The same may be said of those plays of Shakspeare, which are notoriously founded on fiction, Hamlet, Othello, Cymbeline, Lear, the Merchant of Venice, &c., which are certainly not less interesting than his plays founded on the English history, though the latter are so far correspondent to fact, that many of the speeches are nearly a literal transcript from the antient chronicles.

It is the picture of the little world within that interests and agitates us; it is that correspondent emotions are at once excited in our minds by what we see or what we read, without referring to the judgment, or examining the proofs as to the reality of what is presented to us.

The very same principles I apprehend will apply to what is called an animated style, as

to an animated or interesting narrative or description. That style will engage us most which calls up the most lively and vivid images, which upon the principle of association shall excite corresponding emotions in our minds.

I can cite a very decisive proof of what I have now asserted, in the well-known and incomparable parable of the prophet Nathan. The effect of this parable, I assert, is principally owing to the style or manner in which it is narrated ; and to prove it, we need only relate the circumstance in the usual manner of a newspaper paragraph.

“ We have it from the best authority, that Christopher Saveall, of the county of Salop, esq. the other day being surprized by the visit of a London friend and his family, and not being immediately supplied with butcher’s meat, and not chusing to take any of his own flock, they being of a curious breed, dispatched two of his servants to the house of Timothy Boorman, a little farmer in the neighbourhood, who took forcibly thence, a pet lamb, which they immediately killed and dressed for the entertainment of the great man’s guests.”

Here is nothing particularly affecting ; and

yet in England such a circumstance is more likely to excite interest and indignation, than in any of those countries where the feudal system is at all predominant. It must then be from the *style* or *manner* that this narrative has so powerful an effect over the heart, that a person of sensibility can scarcely read it without a tear. Let us examine.

“There were,” says the prophet to the royal sinner, not yet a penitent, “two men in one city; the one rich and the other poor.” Here the different state and circumstances of the two parties are admirably contrasted, and it affords a beautiful and striking opening to the narrative which is to follow. “The rich man,” he proceeds, “had exceeding many flocks and herds.” Here is a fine amplification, and yet so far from appearing forced it is absolutely necessary, and the contrast is still preserved in the succeeding sentence:—“But the poor man had *nothing* save one *little ewe* lamb”—where, observe, the words “nothing,” “little,” and even the word “ewe,” which marks the sex, as more gentle and defenceless, are all emphatic, and increase the interest—“which he had bought,” bought it out of his little savings, it

was indeed his all, “and nourished up, and it grew up with him, and with his children.” What a train of endearing and affecting ideas are here summoned together? Not only the affections of the man, but of his children, are supposed to be attached to this cherished object. “It did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom;”—here the very nature and kind of the animal is forgotten, and it becomes almost a rational creature; which is indeed nearly established in the conclusion of the sentence, for “it was unto him as a daughter.”

Thus the hearer’s mind is prepared by a series of pathetic imagery to feel in a tenfold degree the cruel sequel which is coming, and which is also not less skilfully wrought up. “And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock, and of his own herd, to dress for the way-faring man that was come unto him, but took the poor man’s lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.”

Nothing I apprehend need be added to convince you of the different effects to be produced by the manner of telling a very simple story, in other words, of the effect of style.

From this example too you will see the truth of an axiom, which is, I believe, generally admitted. That it is by a clear and distinct recapitulation of *little* circumstances, which render the picture more vivid and complete, that poets and orators, and all who address the passions of their hearers, establish an influence over their minds.

To select the circumstances which will have most effect is the peculiar province of genius; for there is nothing in which folly is more displayed than in too circumstantial a detail of trifling matters; while, on the contrary, it is certain that a discourse (and much more a poem) which consists entirely of abstract and general words, can never have an effect upon the hearer and reader.

I shall subjoin another instance of a picture composed of a variety of little, but well-chosen circumstances. An historian might have said, in allusion to the shocking murder of Prince Arthur, the real heir to the crown, in the reign of King John: "This event produced a general agitation in the minds of the people; scarcely any conversation occurred in which it was not directly or indirectly alluded to, and

thus the people were prepared for the occurrences which we have to relate." But our incomparable Shakspeare produces an assemblage of imagery, which while it entertains and engages, leaves a strong impression on the mind:

- " Old men, and beldams, in the streets
 " Do prophesy upon it dangerously:
 " Young Arthur's death is common in their mouths;
 " And when they talk of him they shake their heads,
 " And whisper one another in the ear;
 " And he, that speaks, doth gripe the hearer's wrist;
 " Whilst he, that hears, makes fearful action
 " With wrinkled brows, with nods, with rolling eyes.
 " I saw a smith stand with his hammer thus,
 " The whilst his iron did on his anvil cool,
 " With open mouth swallowing a taylor's news;
 " Who with his shears and measure in his hand,
 " Standing on slippers (which his nimble haste
 " Had falsely thrust upon contrary feet)
 " Told of a many thousand warlike French,
 " That were embatteled and rank'd in Kent;
 " Another lean unwash'd artificer
 " Cuts off his tale, and talks of Arthur's death."

Much of the satire conveyed in Hogarth's incomparable prints is found in the minute circumstances which he introduces. I need only mention the coronet, which is so carefully displayed on the crutches of the gouty peer in

Marriage A-la-mode. I think therefore I may advance as an admitted truth, that a style is interesting and impressive in proportion to the variety of vivid images it presents, provided they are strictly connected with the subject, and calculated to excite corresponding emotions in the mind.

You must carry in your mind that I am now speaking of that style which pleases, and not of that which instructs. The work which engages our attention by its matter is extremely different from that which is extolled for its elegance of style. I will not pretend to assert that there is not a certain degree of beauty consistent with the utmost plainness and simplicity, but this is a beauty of a different kind; and productions which possess it will, as I stated, be only read for their matter. I am speaking at present of those sources whence the ornaments or decorations of style are derived.

One, who was himself a philosopher,* has very justly remarked, that "One reason why philosophers seldom succeed in poetry may be that abstract ideas are too familiar to their

* Dr. Priestley.

minds. They are perpetually employed in reducing particular to general propositions, a turn of thinking very unfavourable to poetry." And you will observe that all ornamented diction, every thing that is called eloquence, approaches more or less to the nature of poetry.

LETTER III.

Sources of fine Composition.

MY DEAR JOHN,

METAPHYSICAL writers have generalized and classed the various sources whence the pleasures of the imagination, and the ornaments of style are derived. They are all to be traced into the human passions, for, as I observed, it is by exciting correspondent emotions in their minds that the imagery employed by any writer affects and interests his readers. The same philosophers have endeavoured to explain why the excitement of moderate emotions, such as are produced by the sight of a tragedy, should be a source of pleasure. The best cause I can assign for this is, that life itself consists chiefly in action, and it is only when in some degree occupied or engaged, that we feel the pleasure of living. Violent action or agitation, on the contrary, pains and fatigues. Hence the moderate excitement of the passions on the sight of

a tragedy, or the hearing of a pathetic narrative, gives pleasure, whereas the same event in real life is productive of pain. Whether this account, however, is consistent with truth and nature or not, will make little difference as to the practical part of our subject. It is enough that pleasure is derivable from the following sources, and that what is captivating in writers may in general be traced to one or other of them: 1st, The marvellous; 2d, the new; 3d, the sublime; 4th, the pathetic; 5th, the ridiculous.

1. Our taste for the marvellous is chiefly to be referred to that general principle of our nature, which is so strong a principle of action, the passion of admiration. It may also be increased by the same cause from which I have accounted for the pleasurable sensations excited by tragedy. Almost every thing wonderful is connected with something of the terrific, and we know that terror moderately excited, or I should perhaps say, rather excited by association than reality, is not less productive of pleasure than the pathetic. You must well remember the pleasure which you, but a very few years since, derived from the "Fairy Tales," the "Arabian

Nights," the "Tales of the Genii," &c., and that in general the more you were terrified the greater was your enjoyment of the book.

You will always find pleasure from similar productions, but less as you advance in life. Your mind was more fervid, and less informed when you read them first than it will be at the period to which I refer. You will then be more shocked with their improbability, for the more this kind of imagery is believed in, the more vivid is the impression which it makes. Hence an obsolete system of mythology, such as that of the heathen poets, has less effect upon our minds than a modern well-wrought tale of witchcraft or apparitions, which are more connected with the faith that we profess; and even these had more effect, I dare believe, with our ancestors than with us.

The taste which all mankind naturally entertain for the marvellous is proved by the avidity with which any extraordinary story, even in the newspapers, is received, and the credit which is given to such. People are desirous of their proving true, and almost displeased to be undeceived.

A great part of the entertainment of our rural

ancestors used to consist in hearing such wonderful stories related while assembled in a social circle round a warm hearth. The tales and ballads related or sung by the minstrels of old, were chiefly of this description :

“ Be mine to read the visions old,
 “ Which thy awakening bards have told ;
 “ And lest thou meet my blasted view,
 “ Hold each strange tale devoutly true.”

The effect of the marvellous on the human mind is charmingly depicted by that incomparable judge of human nature, Shakspeare, in describing the manner in which Desdemona was induced to love Othello.

“ Her father lov'd me ; oft invited me ;
 “ Still question'd me the story of my life,
 “ From year to year, the battles, sieges, fortunes,
 “ That I have pass'd :
 “ I ran it through, even from my boyish days,
 “ To the very moment that he bade me tell it.
 “ Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,
 “ Of moving accidents, by flood, and field ;
 “ Of hair-breadth 'scapes i' the imminent deadly breach ;
 “ Of being taken by the insolent foe,
 “ And sold to slavery ; of my redemption thence,
 “ And 'portance in my travel's history,
 “ Wherein of antres vast, and desarts wild,

- “ Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch
 heaven,
 “ It was my hint to speak, such was the process;
 “ And of the cannibals that each other eat,
 “ The Antliropophagi, and men whose heads
 “ Do grow beneath their shoulders, These things to
 hear,
 “ Would Desdemona seriously incline:
 “ But still the house affairs would draw her thence;
 “ Which ever as she could with haste dispatch,
 “ She’d come again, and with a greedy ear
 “ Devour up my discourse,” &c.

II. The love of *novelty* is nearly allied to the principle we have been discussing, and it will be easily conceived to be a powerful instrument in the hands of a skilful writer or speaker, when we remember how strong and how general a passion curiosity is. The word itself has supplied a name to a very voluminous class of literary productions, the professed object of which is to gratify their readers with something *novel* or new. This passion seems indeed natural to creatures, who are in constant pursuit of happiness, and to whom possession brings only disappointment; and perhaps it may not be unphilosophically accounted for upon this principle. The pleasure we derive from no-

velty is something analogous to that which we derive from wit, and the more unexpected the greater our pleasure.

It was characteristic of the eloquence of Mr. Burke, that the novelty of his thoughts and allusions always struck and engaged his hearers. I have seen, in the midst of a grave debate, the whole house agitated as by a shock of electricity, by some new and unexpected sally. These were sometimes of a witty, and sometimes of a serious description. But in either way, I believe there never was an orator of whom novelty and originality of thought was so unequivocally the attribute

If however novelty is so powerful an instrument in the hands of genius, there is nothing in which young and incompetent writers will so much expose themselves as in attempting it. Yet some authors of very secondary talents have acquired much temporary and transient fame, by an air of novelty. Among these, I cannot but rank the author of *Tristram Shandy*, the *Sentimental Journey*, &c. In these most unclassical productions, we see all regard to connexion and arrangement thrown aside; the reader is frequently left to help himself to a

meaning, or, if there is one, it is such as no two men understand alike; sentiment is strangely mingled with attempts at wit, and both introduced with little apparent design.

I was proceeding to treat, in the third place, of the sublime, but I perceive that if I introduced it here I should greatly exceed my limits.

LETTER IV.

III. *The Sublime.*

MY DEAR JOHN,

WHEN you recollect that an author, who deservedly occupies the first place among critics, has written a whole treatise on the sublime, you will probably wonder at my boldness, when I presume to confine so important a subject within the short limits of a letter. But you will remember that these letters are intended only as an introduction to the more voluminous writers on criticism. Longinus too extends his notion of the sublime much further than I do, indeed almost to all that is excellent in serious composition.

Perhaps etymology is in general a better guide to truth than definition. The title which the invaluable treatise of Longinus bears is *περὶ τοῦ ὑψηλοῦ* “of the lofty or high.” To this you know the Latin word *sublimitas* perfectly corresponds, and our word sublime: though I

think *the grand* would express it better in our language. Perhaps Horace has nearly defined it, in describing the character of a real poet—

“ Ingenium cui sit, cui mens divinior, atque os

“ Magna soniturum, des nominis hujus honorem.”

HOR. lib. i. sat. 4.

“ Is there a man whom real genius fires,

“ Whom the diviner soul of verse inspires;

“ Who talks true greatness—Let him boldly claim

“ The sacred honours of a poet’s name.”

FRANCIS.

The sensation of the sublime is experienced when we survey a very large and lofty mountain, a vast extensive plain, a very wide and rapid river; and I believe it is felt by every person when he first contemplates the expanded ocean.

The works of art can sometimes give us the sensation. I never find myself within the long and lofty aisle of a fine Gothic cathedral, without experiencing it; and I conceive it would be impossible to survey even one of the great pyramids of Egypt, without a similar feeling.

The convulsions of nature inspire ideas of the sublime. On feeling an earthquake, or survey-

ing the eruption of a volcano, the sensation must be the sublime, with a mixture of terror. On viewing a thunder-storm at a distance, something of the same kind is experienced.

“ Who but rather turns

“ To heaven’s broad fire his unconstrained view,

“ Than to the glimmering of a waxen flame?

“ Who that from alpine heights, his lab’ring eye

“ Shoots round the wide horizon, to survey

“ The Nile or Ganges roll his wasteful tide,

“ Thro’ mountains, plains, thro’ empires black with
shade,

“ And continents of sand, will turn his gaze

“ To mark the windings of a scanty rill

“ That murmurs at his feet?”

AKENSIDE.

Even ideal contemplations will sometimes affect us in a similar manner. Such are the ideas of infinite space and eternity.

“ In vain do we pursue that phantom time, too small, and yet too mighty for our grasp; when shrinking to a narrow point it ’scapes our hold, or mocks our scanty thought by swelling out to all eternity: an object unproportioned to our capacity, as is thy being, O thou antient cause! Older than time, yet young with fresh eternity!

“ In vain we try to fathom the abyss of space, the seat of thy extensive being, of which no place is empty, no void which is not full.”

SHAFTSBURY.

The same sensation is excited in us by sentiments and passions. Striking instances of magnanimity, generosity, fortitude, courage and patriotism are sublime. Of these, perhaps, the finest instance that ever was pointed out is our Saviour's last prayer for his enemies—“ Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”

Sublimity may exist either in the sentiment, or the expression. When in the former, it is either displayed in the greatness and sublimity of the subject itself, or in the circumstances under which it is described. In the latter case, sublimity of expression, it will chiefly depend on the splendour and magnificence of the imagery by which the subject is illustrated.

In the first case, where the grandeur of the subject is the principal source of the sublime, a brevity of language, combined, if possible, with force and simplicity, is absolutely necessary, as in the famous instance quoted by almost every critic from Longinus to the present time: “ And

God said, let there be light—and there was light.” But the whole of that chapter is incomparably sublime.

Innumerable instances are to be found in Scripture of this species of the sublime, particularly in the Psalms and the books of the prophets, and especially in Isaiah and the book of Job. Such is that noble description of the Almighty Power in the 104th Psalm :

“ Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters, who maketh the clouds his chariot, who walketh upon the wings of the wind.”

I cannot believe the story which is related of Dryden, that he said he would rather be the author of the following translation by Sternhold and Hopkins, than of any poem in the English language—

On cherub and on seraphim
Full *royally* he rode,
And on the wings of mighty winds,
Came flying *all abroad*.”

If I am any judge of the false sublime, I find it in the two first of these lines, where a truly grand and magnificent idea is entirely degraded by the meanness of the imagery and expression.

In the 6th and 7th verses of the same Psalm, is a fine instance of the sublime, alluding, as I apprehend, to the deluge—

“Thou coveredst it (the earth) with the deep as with a garment: the waters stood above the mountains. At thy rebuke they fled, at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away.”

Such also is the fine expression of Isaiah—

“And the heavens shall be rolled up as a scroll.”

And another in the Psalms—

“He looketh on the earth and it trembleth; he toucheth the hills and they smoke.”

An instance of this branch of the sublime as applicable to human character, will be found in Horace—

“Et cuncta terrarum subacta,

“Præter atrocem animum Catonis.”

Lucan has the same thought—

“Victrix causa Diis placuit, sed victa Catoni.”

That species of the sublime, which arises principally from the adjuncts and circumstances, is so frequently mixed with that which is produced by the greatness and dignity of the

subject, that it is difficult sometimes to separate them. In the following passage in the 139th Psalm, which I think the finest instance extant of the sublime, I scarcely know whether to attribute the effect to the dignity of the subject, or to the grandeur of the adjuncts and circumstances—

- “ Whither shall I go from thy spirit?
 “ And whither shall I flee from thy presence?
 “ If I ascend the heavens, thou art there;
 “ If I make my bed in the abyss, behold thou art there!
 “ If I take the wings of the morning,
 “ And dwell in the extreme parts of the ocean;
 “ There also thy hand shall lead me,
 “ And thy right hand shall hold me.”

The strong expressions of the two last lines have commonly escaped the notice of critics— But how forcibly do they impress us with the idea of the omnipresence of God? Wherever we are, we are in his actual custody and keeping, in his *hand*: “ There also shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall keep me.”

Bishop Lowth, in his admirable lectures on the poetry of the Hebrews, points out the following as an instance of the true sublime, and I think it may class with the preceding—

“ Tell in high, harmonious strains,
 “ Tell the world Jehovah reigns!
 “ He who framed this beauteous whole;
 “ He who fix’d each planet’s place;
 “ Who bade unnumbered orbs to roll,
 “ In destin’d course through endless space.
 “ Let the glorious heavens rejoice,
 “ The hills exult with grateful voice;
 “ Let ocean tell the echoing shore,
 “ And the hoarse waves with humble voice adore!
 “ Let the verdant plains be glad!
 “ The trees in blooming fragrance clad!
 “ Smile with joy, ye desert lands,
 “ And rushing torrents, clap your hands!
 “ Let the whole earth with triumph ring!
 “ Let all that live with loud applause,
 “ Jehovah’s matchless praises sing.
 “ He comes! he comes! Heaven’s righteous King,
 “ To judge the world by truth’s eternal laws.”

You will easily perceive that this is only a paraphrase, or rather a translation from the Psalms.

There is no author who will furnish you with finer examples of this branch of the sublime than Virgil. The description of the Storm in the first book; the allegorical description of Fame, or rather of Rumour; the Sack of Troy in the second book; and almost the whole

of the Descent to the Infernal Regions in the sixth, are pregnant with fine examples of the sublime in description. Of the sublime in expression, the following lines afford, in a short compass, a very fine instance, and yet with very little pomp of imagery. They are from the prophecy of Anchises of the future glories of Rome.

“ Excudent alii spirantia mollius æra,
 “ Credo equidem: vivos ducent de marmore vultus;
 “ Orabunt causas melius; cœlique meatus
 “ Describent radio, & surgentia sidera dicent;
 “ Tu regere imperio, populos, Romane, memento:
 “ Hæ tibi erunt artes; pacisque imponere morem,
 “ Parcere subjectis, & debellare superbos.”

ÆN. lib. vi. v. .

“ The subject nations, with a happier grace,
 “ From the rude stone may call the mimic face,
 “ Shine at the bar, describe the stars on high,
 “ The motions, laws, and regions of the sky—
 “ Be this your nobler praise in time to come,
 “ These your imperial arts, ye sons of Rome;
 “ O’er distant realms to stretch your awful sway,
 “ To bid those nations tremble and obey;
 “ To crush the proud, the suppliant foe to rear,
 “ To give mankind the peace, or shake the world with
 war.”

PITT.

Critics have established a further distinction with respect to the sublime, in what they call the *still* sublime, and the sublime of *passion*. The former however is the true sublime, though we find this quality not unfrequently mingled with each of the different passions. The following, from a work which yields not in sublimity to any thing in the English language, without excepting the *Paradise Lost*, will serve as a specimen of what I term the *still* sublime. It will also serve as an example of the sublime in expression, as the imagery and epithets are exceedingly rich—

“ Night, sable goddess, from her ebon throne,
 “ In rayless majesty, now stretches forth
 “ Her leaden sceptre o’er a slumbering world.
 “ Silence how dead! and darkness how profound!
 “ Nor eye nor list’ning ear can object find.
 “ Creation sleeps.—’Tis as the general pulse
 “ Of Life stood still, and nature made a pause:—
 “ An awful pause, prophetic of her end.
 “ And let her prophecy be soon fulfill’d:
 “ Fate, drop the curtain. I can lose no more.

NIGHT THOUGHTS.

Of the sublime of passion we have a very fine instance in a speech of *Othello*—

"Had it pleas'd Heaven
 "To try me with afflictions; had he rain'd
 "All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head;
 "Steep'd me in poverty to the very lips;
 "Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes:
 "I should have found in some part of my soul
 "A drop of patience"—

In the same play, and in the impassioned scenes of Lear, many other fine examples will be found.

An author, whose fine taste and brilliant imagination will ever be admired, and to whose memory his country has still stronger obligations, has written an elegant treatise on the distinction between the sublime and beautiful. The pleasure which is afforded by the contemplation of beauty appears a pure and unmixed pleasure arising from the gentler agitation, and is less vivid than that produced by the sublime. The sublime also differs from the beautiful, in being only conversant with great objects. It differs from the pathetic, in affording a more tranquil pleasure. The sublime and beautiful are, however, frequently mixed, and seem to run into each other, as in that enchanting simile of Ho-

mer, into which Mr. Pope has transposed more of the beautiful than is in the original—

“ As when the moon, refulgent lamp of night,
“ O'er heaven's clear azure spreads her sacred light;
“ When not a breath disturbs the deep serene,
“ And not a cloud o'ercasts the solemn scene.
“ Around her throne the vivid planets roll,
“ And stars unnumbered gild the glowing pole;
“ O'er the dark trees a yellower verdure shed,
“ And tip with silver every mountain's head;
“ Then shine the vales, the rocks in prospect rise;
“ A flood of glory bursts from all the skies.
“ The conscious swains, rejoicing in the sight,
“ Eye the blue vault, and bless the sacred light.”

POPE'S ILIAD.

Of some descriptions also it is not easy to determine whether they belong to the sublime or the pathetic. Such is the short delineation by St. Luke, of the feelings of the multitude on the sufferings and crucifixion of our Lord—“ And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts and returned.”

LETTER V.

IV. *The Pathetic.*

MY DEAR JOHN,

IN my last letter I intimated that the sublime is often connected with the pathetic, though I confess the greater passions assimilate more readily with sublime ideas than the tender and sympathetic.

The force of pathetic composition arises from that fine sense which the Author of our nature has implanted in us for the wisest and best of purposes, which engages us as social beings to partake in the feelings of others; to “rejoice with those who do rejoice, and to weep with those who weep;” or, as a heathen writer expresses it,

“Mollissima corda

“Humano generi dare se natura fatetur,

“Quæ lachrymas dedit.” JUVENAL.

“Compassion proper to mankind appears,

“Which nature witnessed when she gave us tears.”

TATE.

It is of little consequence whether the tale that excites this sensation in us is real or fictitious. It is the general sentiment that is instantaneously called into action, and we do not stop to consider and to reason upon it; it is sufficient if it is only natural.

As is the case with the sublime, there are two principal circumstances which are productive of this affection:—First, when the story or sentiment is sufficiently striking of itself, by reducing all the circumstances into as narrow a compass as possible, and causing them to flash at once upon the mind. Of this, Livy's account of the death of Lucretia may serve as an example: in which the short sentence "Conclamant vir, paterque," has a great effect. An injudicious writer would in this case have introduced long and laborious speeches, and have destroyed both nature and pathos.

The other mode of exciting pathetic feelings is by dilating on the subject, and bringing to view every tender and pathetic circumstance. For an historical example of this, I need only refer to the description of Agrippina's return after the death of Germanicus, in Tacitus. A charming example also may be found in the

Song of Deborah and Barak, in the book of Judges, where the mother of Sisera is described as anxiously expecting his return :

“ Through the window she looked and cried out,

“ The mother of Sisera through the lattice ;

“ Wherefore is his chariot so long in coming ?

“ Wherefore linger the wheels of his chariot ?

“ Her wise ladies answer her ;

“ Yea she returns answer to herself :

“ Have they not found—have they not divided the
 spoil,

“ To every man a damsel, yea a damsel or two ?

“ To Sisera a spoil of divers colours,

“ A spoil for the neck, of divers colours of needle-
 work.”

It depends upon the taste and skill of the writer to employ that mode of exciting pathetic emotions which is best adapted to his subject. The circumstantial method, though the most general, and indeed the most powerful, is very apt, in unskilful hands, to become frigid declamation. I never, on this account, could admire the French tragedies. Racine has less of bombast than Corneille, and Voltaire perhaps than either.

There are some circumstances, the antient

critics would call them common-places, which when judiciously resorted to, will be found very productive of pathetic emotions.

1st. When innocent and helpless persons are involved in ruin. To introduce an infant on the stage in a tragedy, though a common trick, is seldom destitute of effect. If however there are many to participate in the misfortune, the partnership in sorrow seems to lessen its weight. The scenes between Arthur and Hubert in *King John*, are exquisitely touching; and the pathos in *Othello* is greatly heightened by the youth and innocence of *Desdemona*, and her absence from her father and her relations.

2d. A violent abruption from a state of enjoyment:

“ Now warm in love, now with’ring in my bloom,
 “ Lost in a convent’s solitary gloom !
 “ There stern religion quench’d th’ unwilling flame,
 “ There died those best of passions, love and fame.”

POPE’S ELOISA.

3d. The recollection of past happiness, or happiness that might have been attained but for some intervening circumstance, is a fine source of the pathetic. On this are founded

some of our best tragedies—See the Orphan, also the last act of the Fair Penitent—

“ Still as thy form before my mind appears,
 “ My haggard eyes are bath’d in gushing tears;
 “ Thy loved idea rushes to my heart,
 “ And stern despair suspends the lifted dart.
 “ O could I burst those fetters which restrain
 “ My struggling limbs, and waft thee o’er the main,
 “ To some far distant shore, where ocean roars
 “ In horrid tempests round the gloomy shores;
 “ To some wild mountain’s solitary shade,
 “ Where never European faith betray’d.”

THE DYING NEGRO.

4th. Absence from persons very dear. The whole of that inimitable poem, Mr. Pope’s *Eloisa*, affords a fine example of this; and particularly the following lines;

— “ No fly me, fly me, far as pole from pole;
 “ Rise Alps between us, and whole oceans roll!
 “ Ah! come not, write not, think not once of me.”

5th. Exile—

“ Methinks we wandering go
 “ Through dreary wastes, and weep each other’s woe,
 “ Where round some mould’ring tower pale ivy creeps,
 “ And low-brow’d rocks hang nodding o’er the deeps.”

ELOISA.

6th. Inattention to self in extreme distress, and solicitude for others. Thus Lear to Kent in the storm—

“ Prithee go in thyself; seek thine own ease—
 “ Poor naked wretches, whereso’er you are,
 “ That bide the pelting of this pityless storm,
 “ How shall your houseless heads, and unfed sides,
 “ Your loop’d and windowed raggedness defend you
 “ From seasons such as these.”

Such also is the exhortation of our Saviour :
 “ Daughters of Jerusalem weep not for me but
 for yourselves and for your children.”

The Holy Scriptures, which I hope, both as a man of virtue and of taste, you will never cease to read, contain perhaps the very finest instances extant of the pathetic. Who can read aloud the parable of the prodigal son, and not shed a tear? Of Nathan’s parable I have already spoken.

The *tender* is a branch of the pathetic, in which however misery or sorrow are not necessary adjuncts. Here a relief from sorrow, or expected sorrow, is a powerful instrument. Thus Goldsmith, who in the tender excels almost every modern writer :

“ Forbid it Heaven, the hermit cried,
“ And clasp’d her to his breast ;
“ The wond’ring fair one turn’d to chide,
“ ’Twas Edwin’s self that press’d.

EDWIN AND ANGELINA.

The tender however will sometimes be found in a scene of perfect tranquillity ; and it must be remarked that the expression of tenderness is the great excellence in the fine Madonna’s of the Italian school of painting. In the Scripture, the finest examples of this will also be found, as for instance, Isaiah xlix. 14, 15.

“ But Zion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me—Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb : yea, she may forget, yet will I not forget thee.”

LETTER VI.

V. *The Ludicrous.*

MY DEAR JOHN,

THE transition from the pathetic to the ludicrous will appear rather violent, though, if you take Dr. Hartley's opinion on the subject, laughing and crying are more nearly allied than is vulgarly supposed. "*Laughter*," says he, "is a nascent *cry* raised by pain, or the apprehension of pain, suddenly checked, and repeated at very short intervals." I do not, however, press the doctor's opinion upon you; for really if I was called upon for an example of the ridiculous, I do not know that I should not quote this passage as soon as any of the notions attributed to the mock philosophers, so happily ridiculed by Butler—who knew

- " Where entity and quiddity,
- " The ghosts of defunct bodies, lie;
- " Where truth in person does appear,
- " Like words congeal'd in northern air,

“ Who knew the seat of paradise,
“ Could tell in what degree it lies—
“ What Adam dreamt of when his bride
“ Came from the closet in his side,” &c.

It may serve to shew you, however, the general inanity of metaphysical speculations, which I advise you by all means to avoid, and to what lengths of folly human reason will go, when it pretends to account for every thing.

Though we discard, however, Dr. Hartley's theory of the ridiculous, yet I think we may fairly say that it always arises from a striking contrast suddenly brought before the mind by an unexpected combination or association of ideas. Contrast alone, unless connected with the terrific or some strong passion, has a tendency to excite risible emotions. Children whose animal spirits are very active, and whose perceptions are vivid, will frequently be disposed to laugh, at seeing a man with one leg much thicker than the other, or at an animal with only one ear. One of the finest instances of strong sublime contrast that I remember, was when Mr. Burke, in one of his speeches in the house, called the extravagant French reformers “ Architects of ruin ;” and Pope affords an in-

stance of witty contrast in his ridicule of Timon's villa—

“ Lo! what huge heaps of littleness around;
 “ The whole a laboured quarry above ground.”

The contrast must not however be too violent, nor must it involve any thing of too serious a nature, for in that case, a different train of ideas would be excited, which would destroy the ridiculous effect. A better instance it is impossible to give than the celebrated distich from the great master in wit and humour, the point and ridicule of which is wholly independant of the double rhyme.

“ When pulpit, drum ecclesiastic,
 “ Was beat with fist, instead of a stick.”

And again—

“ We grant, altho' he had much wit,
 “ He was very shy of using it;
 “ As being loth to wear it out,
 “ And therefore bore it not about,
 “ Unless on holidays or so,
 “ As men their best apparel do.”

In these instances, the contrast is strong between a pulpit and a drum; and wit and a suit of cloathes. Yet, in the first instance, both (the pulpit and the drum) were made use of to

excite a multitude to arms ; here was a curious agreement found out, and both were *beaten*, but the ridiculous contrast is again brought to view, the one was beaten with *a fist*, the other with *a stick*.

In the other quotation there is a mixture of irony ; for it is meant to imply that Sir Hudibras had no wit at all, but was in reality, as described in another place,

————— “ a tool

“ Which knaves do work with, called a fool.”

Yet the drollery is exquisite in the agreement which the writer finds out between the parsimony of his hero, and that of a miser with respect to his holiday suit. The irony is displayed particularly in the couplet :

“ As being loth to wear it out,

“ And therefore bore it not about.”

On the subject of irony I shall have something more to add, when I treat of the figures of rhetoric.

Metaphysicians have established three relations as influencing the chain of our ideas upon different occasions, there are—1st. *Contiguity*

in time or place. 2d. *Cause and effect.* 3d. *Resemblance or contrariety.**

Under these heads may be correctly classed, the various causes of that fanciful agreement which produce risible emotions. I. Under that of *contiguity* we may arrange,

1st. Bodily singularities, including a grotesque dress or manner.

2d. Groups of contrasted figures, such as an old popular caricature which I remember, of "A Macaroni Alderman and his Rib." The one a squat bloated figure dressed in the extravagance of fashion, the other an extremely tall and meagre female in a dress remarkably prim and formal. I may instance another which is yet popular, "A country Clown placed between a Counsellor and an Attorney."

3d. A confused assemblage of incongruous ideas, such as often takes place in a play to which you used to be partial, *Cross Purposes*; and in the cross readings of the newspaper columns. Of this kind of humour some excellent specimens were afforded by the writers of the *Rolliad*, the *Probationary Odes*, &c.

4th. Meanness and dignity brought together

* See the *Economy of Nature*, b. x. c. 4.

in contact. Under this head we may class the anticlimax, and what the writers of *Martinus Scriblerus* style the *bathos*—one of the happiest specimens of which is,

“And thou Dalhousie, the great god of war,
“Lieutenant-colonel to the earl of Mar.”

Perhaps I might add a specimen from Mr. Pope himself—

“Grac’d as thou art with all the pow’r of words,
“So known, so honour’d in the house of Lords.”

II. Under *cause and effect* we may place,

Ist. Ironical reasoning, and much also of what is called analogical reasoning, which is often as ridiculous as fanciful. As for instance—

“What does it signify (quoth Albertus) whether my nephew exceeds in the cursus or not? Speed is often a symptom of cowardice, witness hares and deer.”—MEM. OF MART. SCRIB.

2d. Cause and effect not corresponding with each other—whence

3d. Ridiculous hyperbole and rant—

“Behold a scene of misery and woe!
“Here Argus soon might weep himself quite blind,
“Ev’n though he had Briareus hundred hands,
“To wipe those hundred eyes.”

“ He roar’d so loud, and look’d so wondrous grim,
 “ His very shadow durst not follow him.”

4th. Much of what is called caricature—

“ Some have been beaten till they know
 “ What wood a cudgel’s of by the blow ;
 “ Some kick’d, until they can feel whether
 “ A shoe be Spanish or neat’s leather.”

HVD: p. ii. l. 2:

III. But of all the relations that of resemblance is the most fruitful of ludicrous ideas.

1st. Of these, the more fanciful and unexpected the resemblance, the greater in general will be the effect. Thus Butler describes the horse of his hero :—

“ The beast was sturdy, large, and tall,
 “ With mouth of meal and eyes of wall ;
 “ I would say eye, for h’ad but one,
 “ As most agree, though some say none.
 “ He was well stay’d, and in his gait,
 “ Preserv’d a grave majestic state.
 “ At spur or switch no more he skipt,
 “ Nor mended pace, than Spaniard whipt ;
 “ And yet so fiery, he would bound,
 “ As if he griev’d to touch the ground ;
 “ Thus Cæsar’s horse, who as fame goes,
 “ Had corns upon his feet and toes,
 “ Was not by half so tender hooft,
 “ Nor trod upon the ground so soft.

“ And as that beast would kneel and stoop

“ (Some write) to take his rider up ;

“ So Hudibras his (’tis well-known)

“ Would often do to set him down.”

The whole spirit of this passage, you will easily see, depends on the allusions. The *majestic* state of the horse, which scorned to mend his pace, contrasted with the tenderness of his feet, and the comparison with that of Cæsar, are highly ludicrous.

Contrariety, or contrast, is classed under the same head of *association*, by logical writers, as resemblance, and of the witty application of this we have a fine instance in the four last lines which I have just quoted ; and in the following from Swift’s verses on his death.

“ My female friends, whose tender hearts

“ Have better learn’d to act their parts,

“ Receive the news in doleful dumps :

“ The Dean is dead (pray what is trumps ?)

“ The Lord have mercy on his soul !

“ (Ladies I’ll venture for the vole).

“ Six deans they say must bear his pall,

“ (I wish I knew what king to call).

“ Madam, your husband will attend

“ The fun’ral of so good a friend ?

“ No madam, ’tis a shocking sight,

“ And he’s engag’d to-morrow night :

“ My Lady Club would take it ill,
 “ If he should fail her at quadrille.
 “ He lov’d the Dean (I lead a heart) ;
 “ But dearest friends, they say, must part.”

The most fruitful source of the burlesque and the mock-heroic is, when the allusion is from the great to the mean or little.

“ The Greeks renowned, so Homer writes,
 “ For well-soaled boots, as well as fights.”—HUD.

The order is reversed, however, in some instances of the mock-heroic, as in the *Lutrin* of Boileau, and the charming *Rape of the Lock*.

“ This nymph, to the destruction of mankind,
 “ Nourish’d two locks, which graceful hung behind
 “ In equal curls, and well conspir’d to deck
 “ With shining ringlets the smooth iv’ry neck.
 “ Love in these labyrinths her slaves detains,
 “ And mighty hearts are held in slender chains.
 “ With hairy springes we the birds betray,
 “ Slight lines of hair surprise the finny prey ;
 “ Fair tresses man’s imperial race ensnare,
 “ And beauty draws us with a single hair.”

In these lines, and in all the poem, a slight circumstance is magnified into something of apparent importance. The card party is an admirable instance in point—

“ Behold four kings in majesty rever’d,
 “ With hoary whiskers and a forked beard ;
 “ And four fair queens whose hands sustain a flower,
 “ Th’ expressive emblem of their softer power ;
 “ Four knaves in garbs succinct, a trusty band,
 “ Caps on their heads, and halberts in their hand ;
 “ And party-colour’d troops, a shining train,
 “ Draw forth to combat on the velvet plain.”

I recommend to your perusal the whole description of the card party, in which the allusion to a battle is finely supported.

I may add a more ludicrous example :

“ The kettle-drum, whose sullen dub,
 “ Sounds like the hooping of a tub.”—HUD.

In all the instances of the ridiculous which I have quoted, you will easily see that the suddenness of the combination forms the chief merit of the witticism, as in the description of the horse from Butler, where the author appears to correct himself.

“ I should say eye, for h’ad but one,
 “ As authors write, though some say none.”

A witty as well as most eloquent senator of our own times, has often employed this stroke of humour with infinite effect, appearing suddenly to correct himself, when he would insinuate something in an indirect manner.

Critics are not entirely agreed in defining the distinction between wit and humour. I am inclined to think it is more accurate to class risible objects as I have classed them, as depending upon the different sources of mental association. But if it was absolutely necessary to make the distinction, I would call that *wit* where the unexpected comparison or combination is made in the very words, as in the passage of Hudibras, quoted by, I think, Lord Kaimes—

“The sun had long since in the lap
 “Of Thetis taken out his nap;
 “And, like a lobster boil’d, the morn
 “From black to red began to turn.”

Also what Dryden makes his renegado say of priests, which by the way is stolen by Mr. Hume in one of his essays—

“And having found what Archimedes wanted, a new world to rest on, you move this world as you please.”

I would call that humour, on the contrary, when the mind of the hearer or reader is only led to make the comparison or combination itself. Thus when a ludicrous character is depicted, the reader’s mind of itself opposes to it

the proper character. I may instance the two following lines :

“ And the gaunt mastiff, growling at the gate,
 “ Affrights the beggar whom he longs to eat.”

Where a number of opposite ideas are immediately excited without being expressed. I may quote also the description of Hudibras's dagger—

“ It was a serviceable dudgeon,
 “ Either for fighting or for drudging.
 “ When it had stabb'd or broke a head,
 “ It would scrape trenchers, or chip bread ;
 “ Toast cheese or bacon, though it were
 “ To bait a mousetrap, 'twould not care.
 “ 'Twould make clean shoes, or in the earth
 “ Set leeks, and onions, and so forth.
 “ It had been 'prentice to a brewer,
 “ Where this and more it did endure ;
 “ But left the trade as many more
 “ Have lately done on the same score.”

During the nine last lines the mind is constantly making a comparison between the low uses to which it has been applied, and the proper uses of a dagger.

This appears to me the proper cause of the power of irony, that the reader's mind is constantly making a comparison between the al-

leged motives, or character, and the real ones. Take as an instance Arbuthnot's account of what passed in London when the comet was expected :

“ If the reverend clergy shewed more concern than others, I charitably impute it to their great charge of souls ; and what confirmed me in this opinion was, that the degrees of apprehension and terror could be distinguished to be greater or less, according to their ranks and degrees in the church.”

To the same cause we may attribute often the ludicrous effect of cant and low phrases, namely, that the mind contrasts them with the proper ones—

“ For which the stubborn Greeks sat down,

“ So many years before Troy town.”—HUD.

“ Sir Hudibras had but one spur,

“ As wisely knowing could he stir

“ To active trot one side of's horse,

“ The other would not hang an arse.”

This definition of wit and humour will accord with the two homely lines of Buckingham, when speaking of comedy—

“ Humour is all, wit should be only brought,

“ To turn agréably some proper thought.”

There is an inferior species of wit, which results from confounding the proper and figurative meaning of an expression, as in these lines of Butler :—

“ While thus the lady talk’d, the knight
 “ Turn’d th’ outside of his eyes to white,
 “ As men of inward light are wont
 “ To turn their optics in upon’t.”

This species of wit would scarcely stand the test which Mr. Addison proposes for real wit, that of being translated into another language. It approaches indeed very near to the *pun*, which I need not inform you is a play upon words according to the different senses in which they are used. Of these we have many instances in Shakspeare, such as Falstaff’s address to the prince, when he accosts him in the character of king :—“ God save thy grace ; majesty I should have said, for grace thou wilt have none.”

Even the chaste and correct Pope is not above a pun—

“ Here thou great Anna, whom three realms obey,
 “ Dost sometimes counsel take, and sometimes tea.”

LETTER VII.

Language.—Perspicuity.—Purity.

MY DEAR JOHN,

HAVING laid before you the principal materials or rather sources of good writing, I must now call your attention to a subject, which I fear you will think less interesting and entertaining, the correct and elegant use of language.

The only foundation of a good style, as far as respects the use of words, is an extensive and accurate knowledge of the language in which we write. One of the principal advantages resulting from a knowledge of the dead languages indeed is, that it acquaints us with the etymology of the many words which are derived from them, and that is often the most certain guide to their correct application. A knowledge of the Saxon, which is not difficult in attainment, should be added, as well as of French, to make a man perfect master of the

radicals of his own language. Yet even this is not enough ; he must also carefully mark the different senses in which words are used by the best authors. Etymology will only lead us to the literal sense ; but the figurative senses are so various, that in some words the original and literal meaning is almost forgotten.

Johnson's Dictionary, which is indeed the best Thesaurus I ever saw of any language, will greatly assist you in this respect. It ought to lie on the table of every young writer. I have often found great amusement in turning over its leaves, and observing the different uses to which the same word has been applied according to the genius of different writers. It affords also an encouragement to this kind of study (which would otherwise be what is called *dry*), by the beauty and utility of the quotations which the author employs to illustrate his definitions. To Dr. Johnson every subsequent English author owes unutterable obligations. He has made straight the paths of British literature, and has even strewed them with flowers.

But a true command of language is at last only to be gained by a diligent perusal of the

best authors. Rules and precepts may enable you to avoid some faults, but they never can give elegance and freedom; that magic power which calls up at once the most appropriate terms, and arranges them in the best order. On this account young writers should be wise in their choice of books, and read none which are not written in the best style, at least while employed in the immediate study of composition. I have thought that I derived much advantage from accustoming myself before I sat down to compose, always to read a few pages in some good writer, whose spirit I should wish to catch, as best adapted to the subject on which I was to write. I have heard it said of that great master in the art of painting, Sir Joshua Reynolds, that he always finished his most exquisite paintings with some picture of the ancient masters near him, which harmonized with his subject, and not only kept his imagination in correspondence with it, but even served to invigorate and maintain the enthusiasm of genius.

A young writer should however not peruse cursorily, but study intensely the best authors. When you read an animated and fine descrip-

tion, it may be of service to lay down the book, and pause and consider how *you* would have described the same scene, or the same action; whether you would have chosen the same figures or phrases, or placed the object in a similar light.

Style may be divided into two kinds, the *plain* and the *ornamented*. To a perfect style of either description three qualities are indispensibly necessary, *perspicuity*, *purity* and *harmony*; and the plainer the style the more indispensable are these requisites.

“By perspicuity (says Quinctilian) care is taken, not that the hearer may understand if he will; but that he must understand whether he will or not.” Many authors plead the nature of their studies as an excuse for not being perspicuous; but as writing clearly depends on our ideas being clear, it can never be an excuse to say to the world, we do not understand the subject of which we mean to treat. Perspicuity will depend, in the first place, on the choice of words, and secondly, on the arrangement of them. As far as regards the choice of words, obscurity results, in the first place,

From obsolete or affected language, which

is not generally understood. The following phrases in our liturgy were, at the time it was composed, good English ; but no man at present could employ the words in the same sense.—“ *Prevent* us, O Lord, in all our doings,” &c.—“ O Lord, deal not with us *after* our sins, neither reward us *after* our iniquities.” In the apostles’ creed also, “ the quick and the dead ” would be more intelligible than “ the living and the dead.” Many abuses of words have been introduced from the French idiom. Lord Bolingbroke, for instance, says, “ by the persons I *intend* here,” instead of I *mean*. Analogous to this is the use of Latinisms, as *integrity* to denote *entireness* ; *conscience* for *consciousness* : “ The *conscience* of approving one’s self a benefactor to mankind is the noblest recompense for being so.”—SPECTATOR.

Again, obscurity proceeds from the use of ambiguous or indefinite words. Examples of this occur in the following sentences : “ As for such animals as are *mortal* (or noxious), we have a right to destroy them.”—GUARDIAN, No. 61. “ The Christians rudely disturbed the service of paganism ; and rushing in crowds round the tribunals of the magistrates, called

upon them to pronounce and inflict the sentence of the law.”—GIBBON. Here it is not easy to define what *service* is meant, whether civil or religious. A similar ambiguity may be found in the same author. Speaking of the cruelty of Valentinian, the historian adds: “The merit of Maximin, who had slaughtered the noblest families of Rome, was rewarded with the royal approbation and the prefecture of Gaul. Two fierce and enormous bears, distinguished by the appellations of Innocence and Uricanurea, could alone deserve to *share* the favour of Maximin.”—IB. It is evident that we must have recourse to the context to understand that these creatures were not the favourites of Maximin, but of Valentinian.

The following are instances of ambiguity in the use of the same word in different senses:

“Wealth and *honour*, or what we improperly call our interests, have now an ascendant over us; and the passion for each is rarely gratified but at the expence of some virtue. And thus it comes to pass, that though we set out in the world with a warm sense of truth and *honour*, experience by degrees refines us out of these principles.”—HURD’S SERM. v. ii. s. 3.

“That he should be in earnest it is hard to conceive; since any reasons of doubt which he might have in this case would have been reasons of doubt in the case of other men, who may give *more*, but cannot give *more evident*, signs of thought than their fellow creatures.”—

BOLINGBROKE'S PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAYS, i. s. 9. Here the word *more* is first an adjective, the comparative of *many*; and then an adverb and the sign of the comparative degree. It should be thus reformed—“Who may give *more numerous*, but cannot,” &c. “Who may give *more*, but cannot give *clearer* signs.”

A writer on criticism has the following sentence: “There appears to be a remarkable difference betwixt one of the *first* of ancient and of modern critics.”—OGILVIE. The embarrassment of this sentence would have been entirely avoided, by inserting the words *one of the first* a second time, which probably an apprehension of offending the ear prevented.

The cases are so very numerous, in which an author in the choice of words, or an imprudent use of them, may darken the expression, that it would be almost impossible to prescribe any definite rules upon the subject. Perfection, in

this respect, is only to be acquired by practice. Possibly the following remarks may be of some use to young writers.

1st. As I before advised, endeavour to inform yourself perfectly concerning the etymology and meaning of words.

2d. Consult the best modern authors, and observe their different applications. The original sense is not always a certain guide in the use of common words; though, if nicely attended to, it will sometimes help us to the reasons of their application.

3d. Be not too anxious for variety of expression. It is well observed by the Abbé Girard, that when a performance grows dull, it is not so much because the ear is tired by the frequent repetition of the same sound, as because the mind is fatigued by the frequent occurrence of the same idea. Lastly, We cannot be too much on our guard against the vulgar idiom. Most writers who affect ease and familiarity in writing, are apt to slide into it :

“ But ease in writing flows from art, not chance,

“ As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.”

4th. That ambiguity, as well as inaccuracy,

is not uncommonly the effect of introducing the vulgar phraseology into written composition, is evident from the very incorrect and absurd use of the verb to *lay*, instead of the neuter verb to *lie*. This solecism has arisen, I presume, from confounding the past tense of the latter with the present of the former verb. Let it be observed, however, that when a noun follows in the objective case, the verb active (to lay) may be used : as, to lay down an employment ; and sometimes when the verb is reflected or neutralized ; as,

“ Soft on the flow’ry herb I found one laid.”

But, to say “ Death *lays* upon her like an untimely frost,” or to say “ I have a work laying by me,” would be a gross and intolerable barbarism.

5th. There are certain elliptical forms of expression in common use which require care in the use of them, least the sense should be obscured to the reader, though to the writer it may appear sufficiently clear.—e. g.

“ You ought to condemn all the wit in the world against you.”—GUARDIAN.

In this sentence, it is remarked by a modern critic, the author does not certainly mean that all the wit in the world is *actually* exerted against the person he addresses; and therefore he should have expressed himself thus: "You ought to despise all the wit, however great it may be, that can be employed against you."

"I beg of you (says Steele) never let the *glory* of our nation, who made France tremble, and yet has the gentleness to be unable to bear opposition from the meanest of his own countrymen, be calumniated in so imprudent a manner, as in the insinuation that he affected a perpetual dictatorship." It is difficult in this sentence to find at first the antecedent to the pronouns *who*, *his*, and *he*; but on consideration, it appears that the *glory* means the Duke of Marlborough, and the difficulty is unravelled. Had the ellipsis been filled up with some such phrase as "the man whom we may justly term the glory, &c." no ambiguity could have occurred.

6th. There are in common use certain phrases which are in themselves equivocal, and consequently often produce obscurity. Such

as, *not the least, not the smallest, nothing less*, which are sometimes expressive of magnitude, and sometimes of the contrary.—e. g.

“Your character, &c. assure me, you will not think that clergymen, when injured, have *the least* right to your protection.”—GUARDIAN, No. 80.

“He aimed at *nothing less* than the crown,” which may imply that he was far from aiming at; or it may signify that nothing less would satisfy him.

“I will *have* mercy and not sacrifice,” would be better, “I will *require* mercy,” &c.—Hos. vii. 6.

“Our English is, among those dialects, *one* that I think more capable of improvement than any other.”—MONBODDO ON LANGUAGE; p. ii. b. 1, c. 7.

7th. Hypothetical or contingent expressions often produce obscurity when intended to represent real facts. For instance, “If he bestowed the gold to relieve the more painful distress of a friend, the sacrifice is of some weight.”—GIBBON, vol. iv. p. 265.

“The supine ignorance of the nobles was incapable of discerning the tendency of such

representations ; they might sometimes chastise, with words and blows, the plebeian reformer ; but he was often suffered," &c.—GIBBON, p. 574.

The obscurity arising from bad arrangement is, however, worse than that which arises from the ill choice of words. Perspicuity is injured, in this respect, in the following instances :—

1st. By separating the adjective from its proper substantive : " They chose to indulge themselves in the hour of *natural* festivity." Better " in the natural hour of festivity."

2d. By using the same pronoun in reference to different persons or things in the same sentence : " And *they* did all eat and were filled : and *they* took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full." By the last *they* it is difficult to say who are meant, the multitude or only the disciples.

3d. By the indiscreet or wrong placing of the relative : " Solomon, the son of David, *who* built the temple of Jerusalem, was the richest monarch of his time." Again, " Solomon, the son of David, *who* was persecuted by Saul, was the richest," &c. The *who* in

the first sentence relates to Solomon, and in the second to David, and yet is similarly situated. It would be better therefore to give a different turn to the sentence, and say—"Solomon the son of David, and the builder of the temple," &c. "Solomon, whose father David was persecuted," &c.

"The laws of nature are truly what my Lord Bacon styles his aphorisms, laws of laws. Civil laws are always imperfect, and often false deductions from *them*, or applications of *them*; nay, *they* stand in many instances in opposition to *them*."—BOLINGBROKE.

"The perception of the human mind of the essential difference which lies in the nature of things, will direct *it* to prize *some* as objects good, and *others* to regard as evil."—MACAULEY ON MORAL TRUTH. The *others* in the last member of the sentence may as well be in apposition to it, and governed by the verb *direct* as governed by the verb regard. The ambiguity would be remedied by iterating the word *objects*, or preserving the natural order.

A certain author, speaking of Porto Bello, says: "This celebrated harbour, *which* was formerly very well defended by forts, *which*

Admiral Vernon destroyed in 1740, seems to afford an entrance 600 toises broad; but is so straitened with rocks that are near the surface of the water, that it is reduced to a very narrow channel.”—JUSTAMOND’S TRANS. OF RAYNAL, b. vii. Better thus: “This celebrated harbour was defended, &c.—it seems to afford, &c.” “This activity drew numbers of enterprising men over to Virginia, who came either in search of fortune, or of liberty, which is the only compensation for the want of it.”—*Ibid.* Here the two antecedents are so confounded, that it requires a pause to distinguish them, and the construction is very ungraceful as well as obscure. One mode of avoiding ambiguity in this case will be, when two antecedents occur, putting one of them, if possible, in the plural, and the other in the singular number.

A modern writer (MR. CUMBERLAND, Mem. vol. ii. p. 152.) uses the following expression: “The Marquis Legarda, governor of Vittoria, to *whom* I had a letter from Count D’Aranda, the Marquis D’Allemanda, and other gentlemen of the place, did us the honour to visit us,” &c. It is not clear whether the letter might not have been signed by the Marquis

D'Allemanda, &c. The ambiguity might have been avoided by saying, "I had a letter from the Count D'Aranda to the Marquis Legarda, and he and the (or he, as well as the) Marquis D'Allemanda, &c. came to visit us."

3dly. Obscurity is produced by separating the adverb and the adjective, or the adverb and the verb. Ex. "A power is requisite of fixing the intellectual eye upon successive objects so steadily, as that the *more* may never prevent us from doing justice to the *less* important."—OGILVIE ON COMPOSITION, vol. i. p. 94. "This subject is precisely of that kind which a daring imagination could *alone* have adopted."—*Ibid.* Here it is not accurately defined whether a daring imagination only could have adopted, &c. or whether it could have adopted that subject only and no other. "He conjured the senate, that the purity of his reign might not be stained by the blood *even* of a guilty senator."—GIBBON. The arrangement would be more perfect, "by the blood of *even* a guilty senator." "He atoned for the murder of an innocent son, by the execution, *perhaps*, of a guilty wife."—*Ibid.* The doubt in this sentence may apply to the reality of the

execution. "Their intimacy had commenced, in the happier period, *perhaps*, of their youth and obscurity."

4thly. The following are examples of ambiguity arising from the wrong position of a conjunction.—The historian, speaking of an impolitic edict of Julian, thus expresses himself: "He enacted that, in a time of scarcity, it (corn) should be sold at a price which had seldom been known in the most plentiful years."—GIBBON. A common reader would infer from the above, that it was a standing order, that corn should in every time of scarcity be sold cheaper than in a time of plenty, which does not appear from the context to be the intention of the author.

"They were much more antient among the Persians than Zoroaster, or Zerdusht."—BOLINGBROKE. The conjunction here is perfectly equivocal, and the reader will certainly mistake the sense, unless he previously knows that Zoroaster and Zerdusht are the same.

"At least my own private letters leave room for a politician to suspect as much as a penetrating friend of mine tells me."—SPECT. 43. The conjunction is wrong placed here, and the

arrangement should be altered thus: "At least my own private letters, as a penetrating friend tells me, leave room," &c.

Speaking of parents misjudging of the conduct of schoolmasters, a modern author on education adds: "It has broke the peace of many an ingenious man, who had engaged in the care of youth, and paved the way to the ruin of hopeful boys." It is not perfectly clear whether the circumstances or the master "paved the way," &c. It is impossible to decipher the following sentence. Respecting the Pennsylvania marble, of which chimney-pieces, tables, &c. are made, the historian adds: "These valuable materials could not have been found in common in the houses, unless they had been lavished in the churches."

5thly. Perspicuity is injured very frequently by the fear of concluding a sentence with a trifling word; but surely, however ungraceful, a confused style is a much greater blemish. "The Court of Chancery," says a respectable author, "frequently mitigates, and breaks the teeth of the common law." From this sentence it might be inferred, that it mitigated the teeth. Better, therefore: "frequently mitigates the

common law, and breaks the teeth of it," or "its teeth."

6thly. It is an old observation, that the desire of brevity generally induces obscurity. This is exemplified in many forms of expression, to which habit serves to reconcile us, but which are in themselves really ambiguous. Thus we speak of "the Reformation of Luther;" which, if the circumstance was not well understood, might mean the reformation of the man, instead of the reformation of the church.

7thly. An error opposite to this is long sentences and parentheses. Long periods, however, seldom create obscurity, when the natural order of thought is preserved; especially if each division, clause, or member of the sentence, is complete in itself. It is in general the insertion of foreign matter, and parenthetical sentences, that confuse a style.

It is impossible to indicate, or even to class the various causes of ambiguity or obscurity. The few I have instanced may serve to awaken attention to this important point; a clear head and diligent study are the only certain means of securing the beauty of perspicuity in style.

But whatever value we may set upon this great essential, there is not any excellence which more recommends style than *purity*. This quality is indeed commonly confounded with *elegance*; though I think elegance implies something more, and necessarily includes some idea of ornament. There is no quality too, which is more easily attained. Nature, or to speak more properly, Providence, must give genius; by hard study knowledge is acquired; but a little attention, with polite reading and polite company, will give purity of style.

A writer of some eminence, with whom I was acquainted in my youth, Dr. Gilbert Stuart, used to assert that the language of books, or composition, was entirely different from the language of conversation. Dr. Stuart was a North Briton, and made the observation at the time when the dialect of that country was much less pure than it is at present. He therefore must be understood as referring to a provincial idiom, otherwise the observation is not true. Polite conversation may be termed a loose and free kind of composition; or composition may be regarded as conversation, pruned, corrected, and refined. We should otherwise write

as in a dead language, and our style would not be natural and easy, but artificial and pedantic, both of which I consider as offences against purity. On this occasion I shall pursue the same order as before, and consider purity of style, first, as it regards the choice of words; and secondly, as referring to arrangement.

The offences against purity of style, as far as respects the choice of words, may be reduced to the following heads:—1st. Obsolete, or uncommon expressions. 2d. Vulgarisms. 3d. Jargon, or cant.

1st. In an age of novelty we have very little to apprehend from obsolete expressions. Scarcely any person, who is at all conversant with polite company, would use such expressions as *behoof*, *behest*, *peradventure*, *sundry*, *anon*, *whereof*, *erewhile*, *whereas*, *fantasy*, &c. It is not a very easy matter to determine the era of pure English; but I think we should not look further back than the Revolution. Hooker, Bacon, Milton, Hobbes, and even Temple, are scarcely to be considered as authorities in this respect.

2d. Contrary to this, is the more fashionable error of using affected language, and particu-

larly Gallicisms. This nation has been little indebted to the literature of France; and we have no occasion to change the bullion of our language for the tinsel of theirs. A modern critic has, with great accuracy, collected a variety of these newly imported phrases: such as, *opiniatre*, *sortie*, *dernier resort*, *beaux arts*, *belles lettres*, *politesse*, *delicatesse*, *hauteur*, for *opiniative* or *positive*, *rally*, *last resort*, *liberal arts*, *polite literature*, *politeness*, *delicacy*, *haughtiness*. These he very properly calls “stray words or exiles,” that have no affinity to our language, and indeed are no better than insects of the day. It is of the utmost importance to literature to adopt some standard of language; there is no setting bounds to the liberty of coining words, if it is at all admitted; and, in that case, the invaluable productions of our ancestors will soon become unintelligible.

3d. But the more dangerous vice, because it is the more common, is vulgarity. Some instances of this, however, are to be found in very approved authors, and seem to demonstrate how necessary it is to be guarded against it. Lord Kaimes speaks of the comedies of Aristophanes “*wallowing* in looseness and detrac-

tion," (which is moreover a false metaphor;) of "the *pushing* genius of a nation; of a nation being *devoid of bowels*," &c. The following phrase is surely intolerably low for serious composition: "To imagine that the gratifying of any sense, or the indulging of any delicacy in meat, drink, or apparel, is in itself a vice, can never *enter into a head* that is not disordered."—HUME'S ESSAY ON REFINEMENT. Dr. Beattie is not free from such expressions: as a "*long winded* rhetorician, "*screaming, squalling*," &c. Dr. Blair speaks "of the subject *in hand*," of Milton having "*chalked out*" a new road in poetry; of Achilles "*pitching upon* Briseis. The following passages are from the same author: "It is strange *how* a writer so accurate as Dean Swift should have *stumbled* on so improper an application of this particle," &c. "When we have arrived at what we expected was to be the conclusion, unexpectedly some circumstance *pops out*, which ought to have been omitted."—BLAIR'S LECT.

In turning over a few pages of Dr. Robertson, one of the most correct of our historians, I find such phrases as the following:

"That by their presence they might be the

better able to persuade their countrymen to *fall in* with his proposals. A cause entrusted to such able and zealous advocates could not *well miss* of coming to a happy issue."

"He *took hold* of the regent by the *proper handle*, and endeavoured to *bring about* a change in his sentiments," &c.

"The love of the which is so natural to all, that in every age they (improbable rumours) have been *swallowed* without examination."

"But during these vigorous proceedings of the protestants, they stood confounded, and *at gaze*."

"Which *must needs* prove fatal to both ;" "and that the matter would seem to be *huddled up* ;" and in Mr. Hume we meet with many such, as "carrying matters with a *high hand*," &c.

Mr. Burke, whose name every scholar and every patriot must venerate, was far from being choice in his expressions ; and I grieve to find that our parliamentary oratory has even declined since his time. Nothing indeed has a greater tendency to debase eloquence than that taste for the ludicrous which has been introduced into the debates of parliament, where it seems lat-

terly to be the principal aim of the first speakers to try who can best act the buffoon.

I shall select a few specimens of the vulgar from a pamphlet of the incomparable author whom I have just mentioned, not to lessen his fame, for that no effort of mine could do, was I even inclined to act an invidious part; but as a caution to avoid faults into which genius itself can glide.

“They pursue even such as me into the obscurest retreats, and *haul* them before their revolutionary tribunals.”—LETTER TO A NOBLE LORD.

“Astronomers have supposed that if a comet, whose path intersected the ecliptic, had met the earth, it would have *whirled* us along with it, into *God knows* what regions of heat and cold.”—IBID.

“At the same time a sort of national convention *nosed* parliament in the very seat of its authority.”—IBID.

“These obscene harpies flutter over our heads, and *souse* down upon our tables.”—IB.

“For this reason I proposed to reduce it (the pension list,) lest, if left without a general limit, it might *eat up* the civil list.”—IBID.

“No other of the crown funds did I *meddle* with.”—IBID.

“In my speech to the electors of Bristol, when I was *put out* of that representation.”—IB.

“Great and learned men thought that my studies were not wholly *thrown away*,” &c.

A great critic has indeed said that sometimes a common expression is more significant than what is deemed an elegant one; and I am inclined to grant that the aptness of these words renders it difficult always to reject them. When, however, we meet with a low word, we ought diligently to look for one synonymous to it. It would probably be a very improving exercise to make a collection, as they occur, of choice and elegant expressions, which may be employed instead of the common and colloquial. Thus, for *heaping up*, we may use *accumulating*; for *shunned*, *avoided*; for *to brag*, *to boast*; for *their betters*, *their superiors*; for *handed down*, *transmitted*; for *I got rid of*, *I avoided*; for *shut out*, *exclude*; for *set free*, *exempted*; for *broke his word*, *violated his promise*; for *gave up*, *sacrificed*; for *stirred up*, *excited*; for *an expedient fallen upon*, *devised*; for *pitched upon*, *chosen*; for *cry up*, *extol*. A

polite writer, instead of saying he is *pushed on*, will say *urged* or *impelled*; instead of *going forwards* or *go on*, *proceed*; instead of *you take me*, *you understand*; instead of *I had as lief*, *I should like as well*; instead of a *moot point*, a *disputed point*; instead of *by the bye*, *by the way*; (though I do not much approve of either;) instead of *shut our ears*, *close our ears*; instead of *fell to work*, *began*. Some words it will be better to omit, as, instead of saying, "he has a considerable share of merit," say, "he has considerable merit."

When an idiom can be avoided, and a phrase strictly grammatical be introduced, the latter will always be most graceful: for instance, it is more elegant to say, "I *would* rather," than "I *had* rather." This idiom probably took its rise from the abbreviation I'd, which in conversation stands equally for I would, or I had.

When a substitute cannot be found for a mean word, it is better to reform the sentence altogether, and to express it by periphrasis.

4th. Another fault, against which writers who live at a distance from the metropolis ought to be particularly on their guard, is the use of provincial expressions. - A student thus cir-

cumstanced should constantly compare the dialect of his own country with that of the best authors, and should endeavour to mark and distinguish all the provincialisms. That this observation is not without its use is evident, when we find even such an author as Dr. Blair employing such expressions as the following:

Vol. ii. p. 206.—“ The middle pitch is that which he employs in common conversation, and which he should use *for ordinary* in public discourse.”

Ib. p. 225.—“ We *will* read him without pleasure, or most probably we shall soon *give over* to read him at all.”

Ib. p. 62.—“ The representing *them both* as subject,” &c.

Ib. p. 109.—“ Without having attended to this we *will* be at a loss,” &c.

Ib. p. 234.—“ There are few great occasions of public speaking in which one *will* not derive assistance from cultivated taste.”

Purity of style, as far as respects arrangement, is equally violated by affected stateliness, and by negligence. Of the former kind are the following instances:

1st. Placing the nominative case after the

verb. Ex. “Wonderful are the effects of this passion in every view.” “Not a little elegant is this manner of writing.” “The demands of nature and necessity was he accustomed to say.”—GIBBON.

2dly. The objective case in the beginning of the sentence. “Varieties of national character we observe imprinted on the physiognomy of nations.” And not unlike this is Mr. Gordon’s very depraved construction in his translation of Tacitus: “At this time war there was none.”

3dly. The objective case before the imperative mood. “How many nations have certainly fallen from that importance which they had formerly borne among the societies of mankind, let the annals of the world declare.”

“Suppose a man (says a witty writer) should gravely address a friend in such language as this: Into the garden let us walk, of flowers it is full, of fruit I think you are fond, on the trees some peaches are to be found, apricots this year I have none, to tea we shall return—what would he be thought? He would be thought a coxcomb and a pedant.”

II. *Negligence*.—I know nothing that more

enfeebles a style than beginning sentences with connective particles, such as, and, though, but, however, therefore, &c. It seems to put the reader out of breath, and partakes, in some measure, of the ungracefulness and confusion of long sentences.

It also destroys that compactness which gives energy to style. These circumstances have made it common to introduce the connective as the second or third word of the sentence: and the same reasons are almost equally forcible against the use of relatives in the beginning of sentences.

It has also been generally esteemed ungraceful to conclude a sentence with a preposition or a trifling word. The auxiliary verbs are generally very bad conclusions. Ex. "If this affects him, what must the first motion of his zeal be?—ROBINSON'S ESSAY ON A SERMON.

"Youth and health are with difficulty made to comprehend how frail a machine the human body *is*, and how easily impaired by excesses." Better: "How frail a machine is the human body."—HURD. v. 21. It gives force to a period to complete the sense only with the last word.

Lastly. There is often inelegance in placing the adverb before the auxiliary verb, as in the following instance: "The question stated in the preceding chapter never has been fully considered." It would I think be better "has never been fully," &c.

It would be impossible, in the limits of a letter, to descend to a very minute detail. A good taste, and the perusal of good authors, must unite to form a good style in this particular. Pedantry, however, more frequently misleads us than any other cause.

The style of female authors flows easier, and is commonly more harmonious, than that of professed scholars. One general rule may indeed be admitted: in narrative or plain didactic composition, in those which are intended merely to convey information, the natural order of the words is to be preferred; but, when passion or sublimity is the object, this order may be departed from, and a sentence must never conclude with a weak member or a trifling word. As perspicuity demands that enough shall be displayed in the first part of the sentence to make the aim of it manifest; so elegance and vivacity demand a degree of energy

at the termination, in order to leave an impression on the mind. Sometimes, however, in very animated expression, it has a good effect to place the emphatic word the first in order, as, "Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord." "*Silver and gold* have I none, but such as I have I give thee." - In this last sentence, the eager expectation, and the imploring look of the beggar naturally lead to a vivid conception of what was in his thoughts; and this conception is answered by the form in which the declaration of the apostle is couched.

LETTER VIII.

Harmony.—Sentences.

MY DEAR JOHN,

THE third quality of a good style, whether plain or ornamented, is *harmony*. The fable, that a swarm of bees settled on the cradle of Plato, as emblematical of the future sweetness of his style, seems to have been invented, like many other pretended presages, only to suit the event. The sweetness and harmony of Plato must, however, be allowed to be his greatest excellence, and that quality seems principally to have given him popularity and lasting fame. But Plato is not the only author who has been elevated into high reputation by his style. The harmony of style must greatly depend upon the writer possessing a fine and well-tuned ear, and this no critical rules can furnish; yet it is possible that, aided by the perusal of good authors, they may contribute to the correcting of a deficient ear, or the improvement of a good

one. Without harmony of style the best matter will weary or disgust; with it very indifferent books have attracted at least a temporary popularity. We have one author in our language whose only excellence, I might almost say, was the finest ear that perhaps ever fell to the lot of any writer—I speak of Lord Bolingbroke. The poverty and triteness of his matter sink him beneath most of the writers of his age, and yet it is almost impossible to read his productions without being charmed: there is in his periods the charm of magic.

I have not a doubt that the harmony of prose compositions pleases upon the same principles with those of verse; and that something like a metrical arrangement may be traced in the style of our best prose writers. This observation will be less clear and obvious to those who are only acquainted with modern verse. There so much has been given to the rhyme, that little attention has been paid to the charm of numbers; and there is a sameness in the measure which inevitably tires the ear. The French verse is all in dactyls;* the English in iambs

* A dactyl is one long and two short syllables, marked

or trochaics. Even our blank verse has too much of monotony to please for any length of time. This is not the case with the Greek and Latin hexameter verses. In them there is such a mixture of dactyls and spondees, that you will scarcely ever find two succeeding lines alike. This finely diversifies the measure, and the ear is not wearied by an insipid sameness, while the verse is sufficiently marked by the recurrence of the same sound at the end of the lines.

The harmony of prose numbers, I am well convinced, depends on the judicious admixture of long and short syllables, and the musical, or perhaps metrical conclusion of the periods or sentences. This is an arrangement made by the ear, perhaps without the observation or knowledge of the writer. A fine ear feels what sounds would be agreeable if it heard them pronounced, and naturally, and almost without effort, moulds and forms the sentences in the most pleasing manner. It might be not an un-

thus: tēgmīnē? a spondee two long syllables, as fāgī; an iambic a short followed by a long syllable—"āwāke my St. John," &c. A trochee a long and short one, as glīttrīng stōnes ānd gōldēn things," &c.

improving exercise to a student, who is master of Latin prosody, to examine occasionally the usual metre of our best authors; for almost every one will be found to have a metre peculiar to himself. I remember when I was young, I sometimes amused myself in this way. I have no note of the instances, but the results I perfectly recollect.

I found that many long syllables crowded together rendered a style languid and heavy; and this I apprehend to be the reason why monosyllables, if too numerous, are displeasing either in prose or verse.

A style abounding in dactyls will seem rapid, but it wants dignity. You will find the writings of Shaftsbury very much of this description.

Many verses in our common translation of the Bible, and the reading Psalms, you will find almost perfect hexameters. Macpherson's Ossian is throughout metrical, and even monotonous.

A familiar subject will accord well with dactyls and anapestics. A grave uniform style abounds most in trochees and iambics.

A rough and halting style is where, from a

deficiency of ear, there is no musical arrangement whatever. What are called round or full periods will be found, I apprehend, to be those, of which the conclusion consists of one or two dactyls, followed by one or two long syllables. Ex. "His empire was enfeebled by the extent of his conquests; and his foreign triumphs terminated in a rebellion at home."

The serious writings of Mr. Addison resemble in their metre those of Lord Bolingbroke, but with this difference, that the style of the former abounds more in short syllables, and is therefore less grave and sonorous. Swift had no ear, and his prose is therefore extremely deficient in harmony; he commonly concludes his sentences with a trochee or an iambic, which renders them mean, and destitute of majesty. The verse of Swift, on the contrary, is fluent, easy, and even harmonious. The reason I conceive to be, that there is something more mechanical in verse than in prose; there are few ears so unmusical as not to be able to comprehend the cadence of verse; but the music of prose is on a more varied scale.

A fault opposite to the harsh and dissonant, for which all the wit and genius of Swift cannot

compensate, is monotony. Though one of the chief excellencies of Mr. Hume was his ear, yet I think a reader of nice perceptions will find his style exceedingly monotonous, as well as his vocabulary scanty. He had more taste than genius. A style to be perfect must be varied in the sound as well as in the language, with a happy mixture of long and short sentences, and the periods not all rounded alike.

Harmony may also be consulted both in the choice of words, and in the mode of placing them. 1st. An attention to harmony demands that we should reject, if we can find synonymous terms, such long, heavy and compound words as *barefacedness, wrongheadedness, tenderheartedness, &c.*

2dly. We should be sparing in the use of such as crowd together a number of short syllables, and in which the accent is thrown so far back as to give an appearance of stammering in the utterance, such as *primarily, cursorily, summarily, peremptorily, peremptoriness, &c.*

3dly. Such as repeat the alike syllable in an awkward and unmusical manner, as *holily, farrillery, sillily, &c.*

In the collócation of words we should also

carefully avoid an hiatus, if possible; and I conceive it may be generally done by a slight inversion or transposition.

Swift, whose taste in prose composition I never can approve, though I cannot sufficiently admire his genius, was very angry with the custom of abbreviating the *eths* in the third person singular of verbs, and reducing them to a plain *s*. The truth is however, that the *s* in these instances is pronounced like *z*, which is not a hissing, but a very musical letter; and I may appeal to any ear, whether *has*, and *dies*, and *lies*, are not more harmonious than *hath*, *dieth*, and *lieth*.

Whether it may not have arisen from an early association I am uncertain; from the Scriptures being translated into this kind of language, and its being used by old and venerable writers; but the use of the termination *eth* in the third person seems to me only adapted to solemn or sublime writing. It is well employed by the translator of Ossian, but is stiff and pedantic in Shaftsbury and Swift.

Dr. Middleton, instead of wishing with Swift to abridge the number of monosyllables, adds a very uncouth one to them, by cutting off the

last syllable from the word *often*; and Mr. Rowe, to soften the language, abridges the monosyllable *them*, by taking away the *th* when the preceding word ends with a consonant. But in general I disapprove of all such abbreviations. They have a tendency to corrupt the structure of our language, without improving its harmony; and are now properly rejected by all good writers.

From what I have stated in the course of this letter, you will perceive that there is a style naturally suited, even in point of harmony, metre, or cadence to particular subjects. The grave and solemn require an equal and majestic succession of sounds; the more violent passions may have longer and fuller periods with more rapidity. But the notion of suiting the sound to the sense, or rather mimicking the motions or the sounds you describe, though attempted by Pope, and recommended by Blair, is extremely puerile, either in prose or verse. The infelicity of Mr. Pope's imitations of this kind ought to be a caution to others not to attempt it. Had his lines—

‘ When Ajax strives some mighty weight to throw,
 “ The line too labours, and the words move slow ;

“ Not so when swift Camilla scours the plain,
“ Flies o’er th’ unbending corn, and skims along the
main,”

been all the author meant them in this respect, the merit would not have been great. It would have only been like the declaimer who acts his words. Such frivolous attempts are beneath a man of great genius, who, if he has an ear, and is really warmed with his subject, may generally trust to the former to accompany the latter with the appropriate words and sounds.

But though the rules of art cannot furnish that important qualification a good ear, still the ear is, I believe, capable of improvement in style, as well as in vocal or instrumental music. I would therefore recommend, as an exercise, that you would occasionally compose one or more sentences on any given subjects, and try afterwards to alter the arrangement of the words in different ways, till you find that which is most sonorous, and most likely to please in delivery ; or if you would read over your different attempts to some friend who had a really good ear, the exercise would be more perfect.

Another practice which will improve you, not only in harmony, but in fluency and ele-

gance of style, is to read over carefully a short passage in any good author, Addison, Johnson, Robertson or Gibbon; close the book, and try to express the ideas as nearly as you can in their manner. Then compare your attempt with the original.

I do not mean to advise you to play the part of a mere imitator, when you write from yourself; for every author should have a style of his own; but by such exercises as these you will acquire a command of language, and a taste for beauty and harmony.

Before I proceed to the ornamental part of style, properly so called, I wish to premise a few words more connected perhaps with the preceding subject. I might have introduced what I have now to state under the head of perspicuity, but that it is in some measure connected also with harmony; I mean the graceful and elegant construction of a sentence. Aristotle's definition of a sentence is absurd, because it will apply to almost any thing as well as a sentence, and does not give you an idea of that which it is intended to describe. "It is, says he, "a speech, or saying, which has a beginning and end within itself." Dr. Blair is

much better, who calls it “ a simple proposition or enunciation of thought ;” and Dr. Lowth’s, with some slight correction, will perhaps be found the most perfect, and comes recommended by its plainness and simplicity : “ An assemblage of words, which in themselves make a complete sense.”

Though this is a good definition of a sentence, yet it must not be understood to imply that every sentence is confined to the expression of one single act, such as requires only a noun and a verb, with possibly an objective case, such as “ He is gone to London.” A sentence may embrace several *members*, or little sentences within it, subservient to the principal and governing sense. These latter are called compound sentences ; and such are the majority of those which occur in composition.

It is upon selecting properly what members ought to be admitted into a sentence, and arranging them with judgment, that the difficulty in this branch of composition depends ; and you will find as much difference in this respect between the sentences of a master in composition, and those of a beginner or an unskilful practitioner, as between the motions of the

most graceful stage dancer, and the arrantest clown.

The first rule that I shall lay down with respect to the structure of a sentence, depends immediately upon the definition I have just adopted, that it shall contain one clear proposition or enunciation of thought ; and therefore you must be careful never to crowd those circumstances into one sentence, which would be better dispersed into two or more : I select an example from Sir William Temple's Essay on Poetry.

“ The usual acceptation,” says he, “ takes profit and pleasure for two different things, and not only calls the followers or votaries of them by the several names of *busy* and *idle* men, but distinguishes the faculties of the mind, that are conversant about them, calling the operations of the first *wisdom*, and of the other *wit*, which is a Saxon word, used to express what the Spaniards and Italians call *ingegno*, and the French *esprit*, both from the Latin ; though I think wit more particularly signifies that of poetry, as may occur in remarks on the Runic language.

Nothing can possibly be more confused than

this sentence, which, to be rendered intelligible, requires to be divided into at least two or three. We have another in Lord Shaftsbury's rhapsody, where he treats of the sun's influence, monstrous animals, and then of man, all in one period.

“The sun,” says he, “breaks the icy fetters of the main, when vast sea-monsters pierce through floating islands, with arms that can withstand the crystal rocks; whilst others, that of themselves seem great as islands, are by their bulk alone armed against all but man, whose superiority over creatures of such stupendous size and force, should make him mindful of his privilege of reason, and force him humbly to adore that great Composer of these wondrous frames, and the author of his own superior wisdom.”

From these, and other examples, which will frequently occur in the course of your reading, you will find that the complaint against *long* sentences arises not so much from their length, as from their perplexity; from their implicating too many circumstances to admit of their being clearly comprehended by the mind at one view. This is often not the mere fault of dul-

ness, which naturally obscures every thing, but it may arise from the exuberance of genius, which is apt to comprize, at a single glance, a vast variety of matter, and to imagine that what is easily understood by itself must be equally so by others.

A very little consideration will shew you that the whole of the obscurity in the first sentence which I have quoted from Sir William Temple may be removed, and with scarcely any multiplication of words, by merely breaking it into three; for instance:

“ The usual acceptation takes profit and pleasure for two different things, and calls their respective votaries by the distinct names of the busy and the idle. A similar distinction prevails even with respect to the faculties of the mind which are conversant about these different objects, and the operations of the one are called wisdom, those of the other wit. This last word is of Saxon origin, and is used to express what the Spaniards and Italians call *ingenio*, and the French *esprit*, both from the Latin; though I am of opinion that wit is more immediately applicable to poetry,” &c.

There is another sentence quoted by Dr. Blair,

from Swift's "Proposal for correcting the English Language," which is almost equally obscure, and which might be rectified with equal facility. After noticing the state of our language under Cromwel, he adds: "To this succeeded that licentiousness which entered with the Restoration, and from infecting our religion and morals, fell to corrupting our language; which last was not like to be much improved by those who at that time made up the court of King Charles II.; either such as had followed him in his banishment, or who had been altogether conversant in the dialect of these fanatic times; or young men who had been educated in the same country; so that the court, which used to be the standard of correctness and propriety of speech, was then, and I think has ever since continued the worst school in England for that accomplishment; and so will remain, till better care be taken of the education of our nobility, that they may set out into the world with some foundation of literature, in order to qualify them for patterns of politeness."

I should perhaps propose some more extensive alterations in this sentence was I to survey

it throughout with a critical eye; but the obscurity, as well as the tediousness of a long period, will be removed even by so simple an alteration as the following :

“ To this succeeded that licentiousness which entered with the Restoration, and in consequence of which, not merely our religion and morals, but even our language, was corrupted. Our language indeed was not likely to be improved by those who formed the court of Charles II. That court consisted either of such as had followed him into banishment, or had been altogether conversant in the dialect of those fanatic times; or else of young men who had been educated in the same country with himself. Thus the court, which before had been the standard of correctness and propriety of speech, was then, and I think has ever since continued, the worst school in England for that accomplishment. Such indeed I fear it will remain, till better care is taken of the education of our nobility, in order that they may enter upon life with some foundation of literature, to qualify them to appear as patterns of politeness.”

The 2d rule that I propose, is to be careful of the too frequent or indiscreet use of paren-

theses. They should always arise out of the subject, and yet be so far unconnected with it, that the sense inclosed within the brackets shall be complete in itself, and such as might be spared without destroying the sense of the period. A parenthesis should also be short, and not consist of many members; otherwise it will become inevitably blended with the main sense, or the latter will be even forgotten by the reader.

I have said parentheses should not be too frequent; yet in oratorical, or animated composition, they have sometimes both force and beauty. Mr. Gibbon was a great master in the use of them—Two casually occur to my mind, and therefore are not to be regarded as his best: “The nobles were taught to seek a sure and independent revenue from their estates, instead of adorning their splendid beggary by the oppression of the people, or (what is much the same) by the favour of the court.”

“The Christians and the Moslems enumerate (and perhaps multiply) the illustrious victims that were sacrificed to the zeal, avarice, or resentment of the old man (as he was corruptly styled) of the mountain.”

3dly. When it is practicable, let the sentence

close with the principal and emphatical words. The genius of the English language admits of very small transposition, and therefore we are more confined in this respect than the Greeks or Romans. Quintilian recommends that the principal word should be placed near the end of a sentence; and the antients generally ended their periods with a verb.

In English we cannot observe the same rule. We ought, however, to place important words where they appear to most advantage: and the most proper place seems to be the beginning or end of a sentence. Of the proper disposition of the principal words, we have a fine example from Lord Shaftsbury, comparing the modern poets with the antients:

“ And if whilst they profess only to *please*, they secretly *advise* and give instruction, they may now perhaps, as well as formerly, be esteemed with justice the best and most honourable among authors.”

By putting the sentence in a different order, we shall be easily convinced how much beauty is lost by bad arrangement.

“ And if whilst they profess to *please only*, they advise secretly and give instruction, they

may justly be esteemed the best and most honourable among authors now, perhaps as well as formerly."

Here the adverbs *only* and *secretly*, being put after the verbs, and the sentence ending with a particle, makes the whole period disagreeable, but they are disposed by the author where they scarcely can be observed. We are to remember, however, that particles may conclude a sentence when they are words of importance, as in this sentence of Lord Bolingbroke concerning his friends :

" In their prosperity they shall *never* hear of me, in their adversity *always*."

Agreeably to this rule we ought to avoid such words at the end of our sentences as only mark the cases of nouns, e. g.

" Avarice is a crime which wise men are often guilty of."

And a certain author speaking of the Trinity, says,

" This is a mystery, which we firmly believe the truth of, and humbly adore the depth of."

The fault and the correction of it are both obvious ; it ought to have been expressed thus :

" This is a mystery, the truth of which we

firmly believe, and the depth of which we humbly adore.”

Compound verbs should seldom be used at the end of sentences ; and the pronoun *it* is generally a very improper close.

4thly. We should endeavour to contrive that the members of our sentences shall rise upon one another, and beware of making the last sentence the echo of the former.

This kind of arrangement is called a climax, when, as we proceed, every member seems to grow in importance. Cicero particularly studied this grace of composition ; and there is a fine example of it in his oration for Milo :

“ Si res, si vir, si tempus ullum dignum fuit, certe, hæc in illa causa, summa omnia fuerunt.”

We have another example in Lord Bolingbroke’s idea of a Patriot King :

“ This decency, this grace, this propriety of manners and character is so essential to princes in particular, that whenever it is neglected, their virtues lose a great degree of lustre, and their defects acquire much aggravation. Nay more ; by neglecting this decency and this grace, and for want of a sufficient regard to appearances, even their virtues

may betray them into failings, their failings into vices, and their vices into habits unworthy of princes, and unworthy of men."

The finest instance of climax extant is, however, that of St. Paul, 2 Cor. xi. 22, &c.

"Are they Hebrews? so am I; are they Israelites? so am I; are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. Are they the ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more: in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft."

The instance mentioned of Crassus by Cicero in his treatise "De Oratore," is also worth your attention. In examining a witness who appeared against his client—"Perhaps, said the orator, the person spoke these words only in a passion?" The witness not making any reply, he proceeded—"Perhaps you did not rightly understand him?" The witness continuing silent, he adds—"Perhaps you did not hear it at all?"

From all that has been said you will be prepared for my 5th and last observation, which is, that the most ungraceful circumstance in composition is what I may call a kind of appendix to a sentence: something added after the na-

tural close, and which is frequently even of a very trivial nature, or which might have been included in the body of the sentence. Dr. Blair very properly terms such sentences “more than finished,” and as I have his work before me, and no better instances occur, I shall give you the two that he has quoted. In the first of these the words succeeding the natural close, which is “indignation,” might have been omitted; and in the second, you will see the appended words are better included in the body of the sentence.

Sir William Temple, speaking of Burnet’s *Theory of the Earth*, and Fontenelle’s *Plurality of Worlds*, observes :

“The first could not end his learned treatise without a panegyric of modern learning in comparison of the antient; and the other falls so grossly into the censure of the old poetry, and preference of the new, that I could not read either of these strains without some indignation; which no quality among men is so apt to raise in me as self sufficiency.”

The other instance is from Swift’s *Letter to a Young Clergyman* :

“With these writings young divines are

more conversant than with those of Demosthenes, who by many degrees excelled the other ; at least as an orator.”

The proper correction of this sentence need scarcely be pointed out :

“ With these writings young divines are more conversant than with those of Demosthenes, who, at least as an orator, by many degrees excelled the other.”

Much has been said by critical writers, but to little purpose, on the subject of long and short sentences. I have already explained why what are called long sentences are usually faulty : it is because they are perplexed by involving the matter of two or three, and this is generally the case with Clarendon's “ Periods of a Mile,” as they are well entitled by a judicious modern poet. Sometimes they have an appendix attached to them, and in old writers frequently conclude with a *by*, a *with*, an *of*, or some other insignificant word ; otherwise where a sentence is clear, and strong, and well compacted, it is never the worse for being long, if kept within the bounds of moderation. Mr. Burke, who was a model of every grace and excellence of composition, was remarkable for

the length of his periods ; but they were at the same time full and sonorous.

If it were asked, however, to what species of composition long or short sentences are most adapted, I would say that long sentences are the language of oratory, short sentences of conversation. Grave and studied composition best accords with a length of period, and some degree of inversion of language is then an excellence, since it serves to dignify and raise it above the level of colloquial discourse. For the gay and familiar, short sentences are best adapted ; as such composition is commonly an imitation of common conversation. On this account Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws* is a most ill-written book. The number of short sentences tires excessively ; and they succeed each other so rapidly, as not to leave impressions sufficiently strong and distinct.

Composition purely didactic, however, in which there is no appeal to the passions, ought not to abound in very long sentences, nor should there be much departure from the natural order of the words. I would almost prescribe the same rule for narrative, especially where there is no description. Where, however, descrip-

tion is introduced, there is room for a display of eloquence, and then the composition may assume something of a rhetorical cast. For reasons which I shall afterwards assign, I think Mr. Hume's history very faulty; but I cannot deny him the praise of a clear and unaffected style, which renders his narrative generally intelligible and pleasant. Mr. Gibbon, on the contrary, has more eloquence, and he describes better than he narrates.

After all that I have urged on this topic, you will derive more of practical improvement from the careful perusal of good authors, than from any rules that can be laid down. Take Pope, Addison, Burke, Robertson, Johnson, (particularly the preface to his dictionary) and Gibbon; and observe carefully how each of these great writers has arranged his words, and constructed his periods. You will find something characteristic in each with respect to the harmony of their numbers, and the structure of their sentences; but though I advise you to study them all, I do not recommend a servile imitation of any. If I was to propose a model for general use, it would be the style of Mr. Addison; for in copying, that you are copying

the expression of nature itself. He is sufficiently pure though not faultless. He is always perspicuous, natural and easy. In harmony he has never been excelled; and his periods are constructed with the art, dexterity and promptitude of a master workman. They are never deficient in grace, though it must be allowed that sometimes they want strength, but that was not an object considering the nature of his subjects. On this account Mr. Addison shewed his judgment in not attempting the part of an orator in parliament. His style was not adapted to it. In fine, to use the words of an incomparable critic, and biographer:—"Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison."

LETTER IX.

Ornament.—Amplification.

MY DEAR JOHN,

THE real ornaments of composition, whether prose or poetry, can proceed only from genius, from a mind rich in such ideas as are the fruits of observation, active in forming combinations, and nice in selecting such as are interesting and beautiful, and adapted to the subject. This observation will naturally recal to your memory what I have advanced in my second letter, that it is the clear and striking display of a number of circumstances which are calculated to exhibit a picture strongly to the mind, that renders a style interesting and animated. Compare the description of the storm in Virgil's first *Æneid*, that of Milton's *Death and Sin*, or the account of a battle by a Livy or a Gibbon, with the narratives or descriptions of ordinary writers, and you will soon perceive the magic touch of genius.

An historian, or even a poet, might have expressed or described the surprise of the northern invaders at finding themselves transported from a bleak and unfriendly region, to the genial climate of Italy, and yet not raise the emotions which Mr. Gray excites even in a few lines—

“ With grim delight the brood of winter view,
“ A brighter day, and skies of azure hue;
“ Scent the new fragrance of the breathing rose,
“ And quaff the pendant vintage as it grows.”

Here even every epithet speaks something to the purpose: the “*grim* delight,” the “brood of *winter*,” the *brightness* of the day, and the “skies of azure hue,” the rose and the grape, so beautifully introduced, are all picturesque, and have a finer effect than a formal description.

Again Shakspeare might have moralized, as many a popular preacher does, upon the progress of human life from infancy to manhood, and its subsequent decline and melancholy termination. He might have compared it to a drama, remarked on the variety of characters which we are called upon by Providence to as-

sume; and he might have concluded, like the gentleman to whom I have alluded, with some good common-place remark, as “ he is a happy man, who plays well the part which is assigned him.” But this would not attract and engage the reader like the picture which he draws of the different and almost contrasted characters in which the same man may be appointed to appear—

- “ All the world’s a stage,
- “ And all the men and women merely players;
- “ They have their exits, and their entrances;
- “ And one man in his time plays many parts,
- “ His acts being seven ages. At first, the infant,
- “ Mewling and puking, in the nurse’s arms:
- “ And then, the whining school-boy, with his satchel,
- “ And shining morning face, creeping like snail
- “ Unwillingly to school: and then, the lover;
- “ Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
- “ Made to his mistress’ eye-brow: then, a soldier;
- “ Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
- “ Zealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,
- “ Seeking the bubble reputation
- “ Even in the cannon’s mouth: and then, the justice;
- “ In fair round belly, with good capon lin’d,
- “ With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,
- “ Full of wise saws and modern instances,
- “ And so he plays his part: the sixth age shifts

“ Into the lean and slipper’d pantaloon ;
 “ With spectacles on nose, and pouch on side ;
 “ His youthful hose well sav’d, a world too wide
 “ For his shrunk shank ; and his big manly voice,
 “ Turning again towards childish treble, pipes
 “ And whistles in his sound : Last scene of all,
 “ That ends this strange eventful history,
 “ Is second childishness, and mere oblivion ;
 “ Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing.”

I select this *well-known* passage, because from its being familiar to you, it will more strongly impress upon your mind the doctrine I wish to enforce.

I had read many accounts of the first crusades, but I never *saw* them, till depicted by the animating pencil of Gibbon.

“ The 15th of August had been fixed in the council of Clermont for the departure of the pilgrims : but the day was anticipated by the thoughtless and needy crowd of plebeians ; and I shall briefly dispatch the calamities which they inflicted and suffered, before I enter on the more serious and successful enterprise of the chiefs. Early in the spring, from the confines of France and Lorraine, above sixty thousand of the populace of both sexes flocked round the first missionary of the crusade, and

pressed him with clamorous importunity to lead them to the holy sepulchre. The hermit, assuming the character, without the talents or authority, of a general, impelled or obeyed the forward impulse of his votaries along the banks of the Rhine and Danube. Their wants and numbers soon compelled them to separate, and his lieutenant, Walter the Pennyless, a valiant, though needy soldier, conducted a vanguard of pilgrims, whose condition may be determined from the proportion of eight horsemen to fifteen thousand foot. The example and footsteps of Peter were closely pursued by another fanatic, the monk of Godescal, whose summons had swept away fifteen or twenty thousand peasants from the villages of Germany. Their rear was again pressed by an herd of two hundred thousand, the most stupid and savage refuse of the people, who mingled with their devotion a brutal licence of rapine, prostitution, and drunkenness. Some counts, and gentlemen, at the head of three thousand horse, attended the motions of the multitude to partake in the spoil; but their genuine leaders (may we credit such folly?) were a goose and a goat, who were carried in the front, and to whom these worthy Chris-

tians ascribed an infusion of the divine spirit.”

Though brevity is a characteristic of the sacred writers, yet they are no strangers to that kind of amplification which gives an energy and an interest to their observations. Languor and feebleness are the characteristics of old age, but how beautifully is this expressed in the following passage :

“ Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say I have no pleasure in them.

“ While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain. In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders (rather millers or men that grind,) cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, and the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low ; also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way,

and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burthen, and desire shall fail : because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets."

From the first paragraph that I have quoted, the style is highly figurative, expressive of the failure of the senses, and of the animal powers. The decay of sight is expressed by the light of the sun and the moon and the stars (all amplification) being darkened. The loss of strength by the " keepers of the house (the hands and arms I believe) trembling ;" and " the strong men," (the limbs) bowing themselves. " The millers, or men that grind, ceasing because they are few," evidently alludes to the loss of the teeth ; and the failure of the sight is again described under the figure of " those who look out at the windows being darkened."

I cannot say that I understand the meaning of the phrase " the almond tree shall flourish ;" but the expression " the grasshopper shall be a burthen, and desire shall fail," is inexpressibly beautiful, and the finest description, in few words, that I ever saw of the extreme debility, and helplessness of old age. The concluding expression is so striking that it has become pro-

verbial, “because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.”

In poetry there is more exercise for the imagination, and consequently more opportunity for this kind of amplification than in any prose composition whatever. The poems of Goldsmith, which, being of the descriptive kind, afford the most ample scope, are almost entirely composed of it. Take as an example, the charming character of the village preacher from the *Deserted Village*—

“Near yonder copse, where once the garden smil’d,
“And still where many a garden flower grows wild,
“There, where a few torn shrubs the place disclose,
“The village preacher’s modest mansion rose.
“A man he was to all the country dear,
“And passing rich with forty pounds a year;
“Remote from towns he ran his godly race,
“Nor e’er had chang’d, nor wish’d to change his place;
“Unskilful he to fawn, or seek for pow’r,
“By doctrines fashion’d to the varying hour;
“Far other aims his heart had learn’d to prize,
“More bent to raise the wretched than to rise.
“His house was known to all the vagrant train,
“He chid their wand’rings, but reliev’d their pain;
“The long remember’d beggar was his guest,
“Whose beard descending swept his aged breast;

" The ruin'd spendthrift, now no longer proud,
 " Claim'd kindred there, and had his claims allow'd ;
 " The broken soldier, kindly bade to stay,
 " Sat by his fire, and talk'd the night away ;
 " Wept o'er his wounds, or, tales of sorrow done,
 " Shoulder'd his crutch, and shew'd how fields were won.
 " Pleas'd with his guests, the good man learn'd to glow,
 " And quite forgot their vices in their woe ;
 " Careless their merits or their faults to scan,
 " His pity gave ere charity began.

I cannot resist the temptation of adding the portrait of the schoolmaster—

" Beside you straggling fence that skirts the way,
 " With blossom'd furze, unprofitably gay,
 " There in his noisy mansion, skill'd to rule,
 " The village master taught his little school :
 " A man severe he was, and stern to view,
 " I knew him well, and every truant knew ;
 " Well had the boding tremblers learn'd to trace
 " The day's disasters in his morning face ;
 " Full well they laugh'd, with counterfeited glee,
 " At all his jokes, for many a joke had he ;
 " Full well the busy whisper, circling round,
 " Convey'd the dismal tidings when he frown'd ;
 " Yet he was kind, or if severe in aught,
 " The love he bore to learning was his fault ;
 " The village all declar'd how much he knew ;
 " 'Twas certain he could write and cypher too

“ Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,
“ And ev'n the story ran that he could gauge:
“ In arguing too, the parson own'd his skill,
“ For ev'n though vanquish'd he could argue still ;
“ While words of learned length, and thund'ring sound,
“ Amaz'd the gazing rustics rang'd around ;
“ And still they gaz'd, and still the wonder grew
“ That one small head should carry all he knew.”

You will easily see that these two characters might have been delineated in few words ; but the enumeration and display of all the little circumstances that serve to mark them, renders the picture striking and perfect.

But though poetry affords the finest field for this exercise of the fancy, so convinced were the antients of its necessity to fine composition, that they proposed certain *topics* or common places to assist the memory in bringing forward every thing that served to illustrate a subject. Aristotle's Rhetoric, which I would have you read as the curious effort of the most methodical understanding that ever existed, is chiefly a collection of these topics. The *topics*, or common places, they distributed into two kinds ; general or metaphysical topics ; or particular topics. Of the first kind were happiness, vir-

tue, the profitable, the good, &c. &c. ; particular *topics* regarded men, places, or times.

Thus under the general topic or division *happiness*, they would enumerate health, security, power, nobility, friends, children, fame, success, disposition, wealth, &c.

Under the particular topic *person*, they would have regard to sex, age, fortune, education, ability, family, offices, &c.

Thus in descanting upon the excellence and utility of any virtue, and to shew how it contributed to happiness, by turning to that general topic, the orator or the student would be led to argue how far it was essential to health, to security, to fame, &c.

Or in delineating a character, by glancing his eye on his common-place book, he would be led to declare what the person was as to birth, fortune, education, ability, offices, connexions, &c.

This method is however too mechanical to be pursued by a person of genius, and none but a person of genius will ever succeed in amplification on any subject. Yet I think I may recommend to you, when you are to write on any subject, to sit down previously and

consider it in all its parts, circumstances and relations, and even to take notes of those topics on which it may be proper to enlarge. In short, though amplification may not be necessary to plain didactic or narrative composition, it may be fairly inferred that almost all the beauties of fine writing will proceed more or less from a judicious application of this principle.

I must repeat, however, that it depends entirely on the taste and judgment of the author to select such circumstances as are really striking, for nothing can be more stupid than an amplified detail of trifling matters. It would be a very instructive exercise, if a *judicious* tutor in rhetoric was to give occasionally his pupils, as themes on which to enlarge, some general heads; as some well-known character in history, the imaginary description of a landscape, a battle, a garden, &c. Or you may do the same for yourself, taking a subject from Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon; writing your own thoughts upon it, and afterwards comparing your effort with that of the author. M. Rollin produces some of these subjects to which

I shall refer, in order to enable you to pursue with more effect this excellent exercise of the youthful mind.

“ The theme is to display the religion and piety of marshal Turenne, even in the midst of battles and victories.

“ The writer must begin with a commonplace, to represent how difficult it is for a general, at the head of a great army, neither to be elate with pride, nor to consider himself infinitely superior to the rest of mankind. Even the aspect of the war, the noise of arms, the cries of soldiers, &c. conspire to make him forget what he himself and what God is. It was on such occasions, Salmoneus, Antiochus, and Pharaoh, had the presumption and impiety to think themselves gods; but it must be confessed that religion and humility never appear more illustrious, than when they render a man submissive and obedient to God in such high fortunes.

“ It was on such occasions that M. Turenne gave the greatest proofs of his piety: he was often seen to withdraw into woods, and, in the midst of the rain and dirt, prostrate himself

before God. He ordered prayers to be said in the camp every day, at which he assisted in person with singular devotion.

“ Even in the heat of battle, when success appeared infallible, and news was brought him of it from all quarters, he used to suppress the joy of the officers, by saying ; ‘ If God does not support us, and finish his own work, we may still be defeated.’ ”

This subject, as treated by M. Mascaron, in the funeral oration of M. Turenne.

“ Do not imagine that our hero lost those religious sentiments at the head of armies, and in the midst of victories. Certainly, if there is any conjuncture in which the soul, full of itself, is in danger of forgetting God, it is in those illustrious stations where a man becomes as a god to others, by the wisdom of his conduct, the greatness of his courage, the strength of his arm, and the number of his soldiers ; and, being wholly inspired with glory, inspires all besides with love, admiration, or terror. Even the externals of war, the sound of trumpets, the glitter of arms, the order of the troops, the silence of the soldiers, their ardor in fight ; the

beginning, progress, and end of the victory ; the different cries of the conquered and the conquerors ; all these assail the soul on different sides, which, deprived of all wisdom and moderation, knows neither God, nor itself. It is then the impious Salmoneus presumes to imitate the thunder of God, and to answer the thunderbolts of Heaven with those of the earth. It was then the sacrilegious Antiochus worshipped nothing but his own strength and courage ; and the insolent Pharaoh, swoln with the pride of his power, cried out, I am my own maker. But do religion and humility ever appear more majestic, than when they keep the heart of man, though in so exalted a point of glory, in that submission and dependence which the creature ought to observe with regard to his God ?

“ M. Turenne was never more sensible that there was a God, than on those extraordinary occasions, when others generally forget their Creator. It was then his prayers were most fervent. We have seen him retiring into woods, where, in the midst of rain, with his knees in the dirt, he adored that God in this humble posture, before whom legions of angels tremble, and prostrate themselves. The Israelites, to

secure themselves of victory, ordered the ark of the covenant to be brought into their camp: and M. Turenne did not believe his could be safe, if not fortified daily by the oblation of the divine victim, who triumphed over all the powers of hell. He assisted at it with a devotion and modesty capable of inspiring awe in those obdurate souls, on whom the sight of the most tremendous mysteries makes no impression.

“ Even in the progress of victory itself, and in those moments of self-love, when a general sees fortune declare in his favour, his piety was watchful to prevent his giving the jealous God the least offence, by too hasty an assurance of conquering. Though the cries of victory echoed round him; though the officers flattered themselves and him also with assurance of success; he still checked all the extreme emotions of joy, in which human pride has so great a share, by these words, highly worthy of his piety: *If God does not support us, and accomplish his work, we may still be defeated.*”—ROLLIN.

The modesty of M. Turenne. His private life.

“ No person ever spoke more modestly of

himself than M. Turenne. He related his most surprising victories, as if he had no share in them. At his return from the most glorious campaigns, he avoided praise, and was afraid of appearing in the king's presence, for fear of applause. It was then, in a private state, among a few friends, he exercised himself in the virtues of civil life. He conceals himself, and walks without attendance or equipage: but every one observes and admires him."

This theme extended by Flechier.

"Who ever performed such great exploits, and who more reserved in speaking of them? When he gained an advantage, he himself ascribed it to the enemy's oversight, and not to his own abilities. When he gave an account of a battle, he forgot nothing, but its being gained by his own conduct. If he related any of those actions which had rendered him so famous, one would have concluded he had only been a spectator, and might doubt whether he himself or fame was mistaken. When he returned from those glorious campaigns, which immortalize him, he avoided all acclamations of the people; he blushed at his victories; he

received applauses with the same air that others make apologies, and was almost afraid of waiting upon the king, being obliged, through respect, to hear patiently the encomiums with which his Majesty never failed to honour him.

“ It was then, in the calm repose of a private state, that this prince, divesting himself of all the glory he had acquired in the field, and shutting himself up with a small company of chosen friends, practised in silence the virtues of civil life : sincere in his words, plain in his actions, faithful in friendship, exact in duties, regular in his wishes, and great even in the minutest things. He concealed himself; but his fame discovers him. He walks without attendance; but every one images him riding in a triumphal chariot. When people see him, they count the number of the enemies he has conquered, and not the attendants that follow him. Though alone, they conceive him surrounded with his attendant virtues and victories. There is something inexpressibly great and noble in this virtuous simplicity; and the less haughty he is, the more venerable he appears.”—ROLLIN.

The Queen of England's escape by sea.

“ The queen was obliged to leave her kingdom. She sailed out of the English ports in sight of the rebel fleet, which pursued her close. This voyage was far different from that she had made on the same sea, when she went to take possession of the sceptre of great Britain. At that time every thing was propitious ; now all the reverse.”

“ * The queen was obliged to leave her kingdom. And indeed she sailed out of the English ports in sight of the rebellious navy, which chased her so close, that she almost heard their cries and insolent threats. Alas ! how different was this voyage from that she made on the same sea, when, coming to take possession of the sceptre of Great Britain, she saw the billows smooth themselves, as it were, under her, to pay homage to the queen of the seas ! Now chased, pursued, by her implacable enemies ; who had been so audacious as to draw up an accusation against her : sometimes just escaped,

* The queen of Eng'and's funeral oration, by M. Bossuet.

sometimes just taken; her fortune shifting every quarter of an hour, having no other assistance but God, and her own invincible fortitude, she had neither winds nor sails enough to favour her precipitate flight.”—ROLLIN.

Perhaps the following instance from Mr. Burke will be still more pleasing, and I am sure it is more eloquent than those I have just quoted. You will observe that he might have said the whole in few words—that Mr. Howard evinced his philanthropy in foregoing every comfort, and despising every danger, for the sake of relieving the distresses of his fellow creatures—

“ I cannot name this gentleman without remarking, that his labours and writings have done much to open the eyes and hearts of mankind. He has visited all Europe—not to survey the sumptuousness of palaces, or the stateliness of temples; not to make accurate measurements of the remains of antient grandeur; nor to form a scale of the curiosity of modern art; nor to collect medals, or collate manuscripts: but to dive into the depth of dungeons; to plunge into the infection of hospitals; to survey the mansions of sorrow and

pain ; to take the gauge and dimensions of misery, depression, and contempt ; to remember the forgotten, to attend to the neglected, to visit the forsaken, and to compare and collate the distresses of all men in all countries. His plan is original ; and it is as full of genius as it is of humanity. It was a voyage of discovery ; a circumnavigation of charity. Already the benefit of his labour is felt more or less in every country : I hope he anticipates his final reward, by seeing all its effects fully realized in his own. He will receive, not by retail but in gross, the reward of those who visit the prisoner ; and he has so forestalled and monopolized this branch of charity, that there will be, I trust, little room to merit by such acts of benevolence hereafter.”—ADDRESS TO THE ELECTORS OF BRISTOL.

The beauty of this last quotation depends not entirely on the lively detail of circumstances connected with the subject, but on allusions to matters really foreign to it ; and of these I shall treat in my succeeding letter.

LETTER X.

Figurative Language.—Comparisons and Similies.

MY DEAR JOHN,

A VIVID imagination is not satisfied with bringing before the reader's mind all the circumstances immediately connected with the principal subject, and placing them in a striking point of view; it borrows colours and forms from other objects to diversify and adorn the picture it draws—

“ The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling,

“ Doth glance from heav'n to earth, from earth to heaven;

“ And, as imagination bodies forth

“ The forms of things unknown, the *poet's* pen

“ Turns them to shape,” &c.

You will easily perceive that I am now going to speak of figurative language. It is called figurative, because the author's meaning is expressed, not by the strict and proper phrases, but under the image or appearance of some-

thing else. Thus figurative language, if taken according to the literal sense of the words, would usually mislead.

It is extraordinary, however, that what appears a deviation from nature or reason should be so extremely common, that scarcely a sentence occurs without some word in it used in a figurative sense. Indeed if you will read with attention Mr. Tooke's "Epea Pteroenta" (a work which every one ought to read) you will find that our most common particles are words distorted from their natural and primitive meaning. Dr. Blair used to remark on this subject, that at the moment he was speaking on a didactic subject, he was addressing his audience in figurative language.

The origin of figures has been referred to the poverty of language; but I rather consider them either as the sport of the fancy, or as the expression of passion or enthusiasm. We see imagery, and especially from natural objects, employed by the rudest and most savage nations, not from necessity, but from choice. The few specimens which we have had translated of Indian eloquence are abundantly figurative, and no writings can be more conspicuous

in this respect than the earliest productions of the Arabians. The writings of the Hebrews proceed from a higher source than mere human invention, yet we may easily conceive them, in style and manner, adapted to the circumstances of the age and the taste of the people. They are highly figurative, and that most accurate critic, Bishop Lowth, in his incomparable "Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews," has shewn that their imagery was all derived from those objects with which, from the time and situation of the country and nation, they were most familiar.

This branch of ornament is much more easily reduced to rule and methodical arrangement than that of which I have just been treating. But though it is easy to class the different forms of figurative language, still treatises on rhetoric will afford you as little substantial aid in this instance as in the former; for however reluctant the professor in this art may be, to own a truth destructive of his very profession, still he must confess with Butler;

"That all a rhetorician's rules

"Teach nothing but to name his tools."

It is genius alone that can enable you to use them; and it is a mind copiously stored with knowledge that can furnish the materials. The only essential service that can be rendered to a young writer in this way, is to caution him against the indiscreet and indiscriminate use of this species of ornament: for though its effect, is fine in impassioned composition, and under the direction of a good taste, nothing can be more vapid, cold, and disgusting than a style overcharged with common-place metaphors and comparisons.

Figurative language, it is obvious, must depend upon the principle of association, and of the three relations cause and effect, contiguity, and resemblance; the latter is the most fertile in the production of tropes and figures. That fancy which is most excursive, and which is the best stored with various knowledge, will be the most active in forming the combinations essential to figurative language. The various knowledge which extended to the detail of almost every subject in nature, and in art, is most conspicuous in Shakspeare, and in Butler; and among the moderns none have excelled Mr.

Burke in the boldness and variety of his imagery.

I shall not perplex you with the distinction between tropes and figures; but since I have casually mentioned them, and since the words will often occur in conversation, I shall observe that in truth, each of these words is but a partial mode of expressing the same thing. A *trope*, *τροπος* in Greek, signifies no more than the *turning* of a word from its original meaning. *Figure*, as I before observed, is when an idea is expressed under the appearance of something else. The antient critics classed as *tropes* the metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony; the figures were almost innumerable.

Leaving then to Farnaby, and his brethren, the many useless distinctions which the Greeks have made as to what are called figures, I shall proceed to treat of those forms of expression, in the order which is suggested by the three relations of resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect.

From the relation of resemblance proceed the comparison or simile, the metaphor, the allegory, and the allusion; on the other relations

depend the metonymy; the synecdoche, the periphrasis, the prosopoeia, and probably the apostrophe.

The comparison appears to be the first and most natural of all the rhetorical figures. When at a loss to explain our meaning, we are disposed always to apply to the associating principle to furnish an illustration. In this way, a comparison may occur in the simplest and plainest composition, even in a lecture on experimental philosophy.

But I wish rather to treat of them here as a source of ornament, and when judiciously applied there is scarcely any ornament more pleasing. I must observe, however, that the mind of the author must be supposed to be in a cool state, when it descends to this sport of the imagination. Similies are not the natural language of passion; they will apply in description, in narrative, but will not serve to express the vehement emotions of the mind; since then, if the imagination is disposed to be excursive, it will naturally drop the words expressing the resemblance, and snatching the image forcibly at once, express itself in metaphor.

Hence you will perceive that the difference between a simile and a metaphor is, that in the former the resemblance is brought before the reader's view by comparing the ideas together, and by words expressing a likeness; a metaphor is a comparison without the words expressing resemblance. I may add, that a distinction might be established between the words *comparison* and *simile*. The former is the general word comprehending the whole class, or when used in a limited sense, is more immediately appropriated to the most perfect of the kind; *that* in which the resemblance is minutely traced through all the agreeing parts of the objects assimilated. The word *simile* seems chiefly appropriated to poetry; and I think implies a slighter and more fanciful resemblance.

The Hebrew writings are unquestionably the oldest that have been transmitted to us: their imagery is almost exclusively derived from natural objects; this imparts to them a simplicity which can be attributed to no other writings. Some of their comparisons are however remarkably bold, and some incomparably beautiful, as you will see by consulting a work, which

contributed beyond any other to the improvement of my taste, Bishop Lowth's Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews.

One imperfection, however, I have to remark in the similies of the Hebrews, and of the Orientals in general, that the resemblance is often too fanciful and remote. Of this I shall produce an instance from the book of Job, c. vi. v. 15—20.

“ My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the stream of brooks they pass away : which are blackish by reason of the ice, and wherein the snow is hid. What time they were warm they vanish : when it is hot they consume out of their place. The paths of their way are turned aside : they go to nothing and perish. The troops of Tema looked, the companions of Sheba waited for them. They were confounded because they had hoped ; they came thither and were ashamed.”

The 133d Psalm consists of one of these fanciful similies, but it is extremely beautiful. It is somewhat amplified by Buchanan, and in translating it I made use of a part of his imagery.

Sweet is the love that mutual glows
Within each brother's breast ;
And binds in gentlest bonds each heart,
All blessing, and all blest.

Sweet as the odorous balsam pour'd
On Aaron's sacred head,
Which o'er his beard, and down his vest,
A breathing fragrance shed.

Like morning dews on Sion's mount,
That spread their silver rays ;
And deck with gems the verdant pomp
That Hermon's top displays.

Another particular may also be remarked, which is, that the Hebrew similies are frequently very short. The resemblance usually turns upon a single circumstance, which they explain in few words, and seldom introduce any matter at all foreign to the purpose.

The classical writers are more sparing of their similies, and they introduce them with greater pomp and form. There is however a disgusting sameness in those of the antient epic poets. In their descriptions of battles, for instance, the imagery of a lion, a bull, an eagle, and others of the fiercer animals so commonly

occurs, that I am frequently more disposed to pass over their similies than to stop and admire them.

The modern writers are possessed of considerable advantages, in this respect, and to these they have not been inattentive. The more extensive views which they possess of sciences, and arts, and of the history of nature in particular, has opened to them a wider and more varied field in poetical imagery. They now decorate our gravest productions, and surprise by their novelty and fanciful application. A very beautiful comparison presents itself at this moment to my memory, from the elegant and lively sermons of Dr. Ogden. In one of his discourses against slander—"Censure," says the preacher, "is in season so very seldom, that it may be compared to that bitter plant, which hardly comes to its maturity in the life of a man, and is said to flower but once in a hundred years."

The following is fanciful, yet perhaps the transitory nature, as well as the splendour of traditional fame, is well imagined under this image—"Then let us be renowned while we may, and leave our fame behind us, like the

last beams of the sun, when he hides his red head in the west.”—OSSIAN.

From what I have observed, it will follow, that the author who possesses the greatest scope of knowledge, if he has an active and lively fancy, will have the greatest command of imagery, and will produce the boldest and most varied comparisons. Yet the metaphysical poets of Charles the Second's reign, as they are very properly termed by Dr. Johnson, were guilty of such abuses that they disgust us with the figurative style. Their imagery was not select, nor under the regulation of good taste; without which even genius itself will be able to effect but little. Several rules have therefore been established with respect to the use of comparisons, which may serve to restrain the vicious exuberances of youthful genius.

Ist. A comparison taken from a common or vulgar object, should have something particularly ingenious in it to render it tolerable. I shall not name the poet from whom the following distich is extracted, but you will be surprised to know that he is of a very high reputation.

“ The rage of jealousy then fired his soul,

“ And his face kindled *like a burning coal.*”

Such nonsense as the following is scarcely to be endured—"A good sermon, like a good peach, is indeed a *composition* of *rich* materials, which the maker has associated to bring it to its proper flavour, but which the eater may relish, and from which he may derive nourishment without being obliged to learn chemistry, or knowing how to decompose, and reduce the whole to its parts."—ROBINSON'S TRANSLATION OF CLAUDE'S ESSAY, C. 4. NOTE.

Even Dr. Campbell, who has written so well on the principles of rhetoric, is scarcely more fortunate—"A paraphrase," he observes, "is like a torpedo, for it benumbs the sense; and the gospel, by this means, becomes like a wine of a rich flavour, diluted in such a quantity of water as renders it extremely vapid." The same simile, by the way, he has repeated in another place.

You must however be aware that comparisons taken from low and mean objects are well adapted to the burlesque.

2dly. They ought not to be trite; such as comparing a violent passion to a tempest; virtue to the sun; one in distress to a flower drooping its head.

3dly. Comparisons or similies ought to be founded on a likeness neither too obvious nor too remote : if the likeness is too obvious it disgusts, if too remote it perplexes; in the one case the reader easily perceives it, and therefore conceives the writer to be a person of inferior genius ; in the other case it savours of affectation and pedantry. Some of Milton's seem of too obvious a kind, where he compares Eve to a Dryad, and the bower of Paradise to the arbour of Pomona. For there appears no art or ingenuity in saying one arbour is like another, or that a woman resembles a wood nymph.

4thly. They should not be drawn from objects quite unknown, for these, instead of throwing light upon a subject, can only serve to render it more obscure.

5thly. From what I have observed before, neither this nor any other figure should be borrowed from metaphysical ideas. But for the incomparable exposure of this fault I refer you to Dr. Johnson's Life of the poet Cowley.

LETTER XI.

Metaphors.

MY DEAR JOHN,

I OBSERVED in my last letter that a metaphor is a comparison, without the words indicating resemblance. When a savage experienced a sensation, for which he had as yet no name, he applied that of the idea which most resembled it, in order to explain himself. Thus the words expressing the faculties of the mind are taken from sensible images, as fancy from *phantasm*: idea in the original language means an image or picture; and a way has always been used to express the mode of attaining our end or desire.

There is, however, as I have already expressed, another reason for the use of metaphorical language, and which, in an advanced state of society, is the most common; that is, when the mind is agitated, the associations are more strongly felt, and the connected ideas will more readily present themselves than at another time. On this account a man in a passion will fre-

quently reject the words which simply express his thoughts, and for the sake of giving them more force, will make use of images stronger, more lively, and more congenial to the tone of his mind.

The principal advantage which the metaphor possesses over the simile or comparison, seems to consist in the former transporting the mind, and carrying it nearer the reality than the latter; as when we say—"Achilles rushed like a lion," we have only the idea of *a man* going on furiously to battle; but when we say instead of Achilles—"The lion rushed on," the image is more vivid. Thus also when Virgil calls the Scipios "the thunderbolts of war," the idea is more animated than if he had compared them to thunderbolts. There is also more of brevity in a style that abounds in metaphors, than in a style which consists more of comparisons, and therefore it proves a better vehicle for the passionate or sublime.

The rule which good writers seem to have adopted respecting the distinct use of similes or metaphors is this: Where the resemblance is very strong and obvious, it may be expressed by a simple metaphor, and it will in general be

expressed more forcibly ; but where the resemblance is not so obvious, it requires to be more expanded, and then a comparison or simile will neither appear formal nor pompous.

There is another observation concerning the use of these figures, which is more common, though I do not think the reason of it is generally understood. Comparisons, as I had occasion to observe before, are unnatural in extremes of passion, though metaphors are not. The truth is, the mind, when strongly agitated, readily catches at slight associations, and metaphors therefore are instantaneously formed ; but it is impossible that the imagination in that state should dwell upon them with the formality and exactness of a person making a comparison.

A metaphor is not always confined to a single word. It may extend to a whole sentence, though when much expanded, rhetoricians call it by another name, an ALLEGORY. It is not easy to say under which head we should rank the following bold and animated figure :

“ The swarm of monks that arose from the Nile, overspread and darkened the face of the Christian world.”—GIBBON’S HIST. c. 20.

Some metaphors, and particularly those which consist of a single word, have become so common that they are scarcely to be considered as figurative. Thus when we speak of an *arm* of the sea, or of the *foot* of a mountain, we scarcely seem to speak figurative language; though these are in reality what may be called hard metaphors.

The principal uses of metaphors are,

1st. As was intimated in speaking of the advantages they possess over comparisons, they render a style more animated, by introducing a new idea, in which for the moment the original seems to be lost or absorbed. In this way they serve even to enrich a language, and most languages without them would be exceedingly limited, at least in the application of words, which would produce necessarily great stiffness and formality.

2dly. They greatly vary and diversify a style, and consequently relieve us from that tedious uniformity which would be the result of a style where every word was used in the literal sense.

3dly. They serve to enlarge and elevate our subject; for we can borrow a metaphor from something which possesses the quality we mean

to ascribe to it, in a higher or more extensive degree. Thus a huge dog, or even a man, described under the metaphor of an elephant, will appear to the imagination of the hearer as greater perhaps than the object really is. A "torrent of words" magnifies in imagination the loudness and rapidity of the speaker: though this metaphor, like some of those which I have mentioned, is now so common, that its force as a figure is greatly weakened. Sometimes even a metaphor or comparison taken from an inferior subject will have this effect, by impressing the circumstance more strongly on the mind, by means of a familiar idea. Thus, when in the book of Job, leviathan is described as "making the deep to boil like a pot," our notion of the magnitude and strength of the animal is not lessened, since we still carry in our minds the idea of the ocean, and apply the simile of the boiling cauldron only to the agitation occasioned by his motions.

4thly. For these reasons they bestow dignity on composition. How much nobler is it to say, "the vault of heaven," than to use the common word, "the *sky*." So we say, "the evening of life," for "old age." Thus the

expression, "Death spares neither the rich nor the poor," is low, when compared with Horace :

" Pallida mors æquo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas
" Regumque turres."

" With equal pace impartial fate
" Knocks at the palace, as the cottage gate."

5thly. By metaphors, two objects are presented at the same time, without any confusion ; as in the example already mentioned, we can, at the same time, have a clear and distinct view of the evening and of old age.

6thly. They often afford us a more clear and striking view of things ; they place them in a picturesque manner before our eyes ; so in that example we easily call to mind, that as noon succeeds to morning, and evening to noon, so youth is followed by manhood, and that by old age. The dark and silent evening too presents us with a striking picture of the gradual decline and deprivation of the faculties, both bodily and mental, " When the grasshopper shall be a burthen, and desire shall fail," &c.

Though however metaphors thus enliven and diversify composition, much taste is required

in the employment of them. Young writers especially are too apt to be enamoured of them, and to use them in too great profusion, and with too little discrimination and selection. Nearly the same rules will apply to metaphors, as I have endeavoured to establish with respect to comparisons. I shall however subjoin a few further practical instructions.

The first rule then that I would lay down is not to be too profuse of them. By introducing too many metaphors into one sentence, we render it obscure, instead of more perspicuous. If they are too gay also, they probably may not suit the subject. Young authors are very apt to fall into this mistake; they commonly think that composition the best that is crowded with shining metaphors; but, as Dr. Blair justly remarks, we should remember that they are only the dress of the thoughts, and as the dress ought always to be suited to the station of the person who wears it, so language should be suited to the nature of the subject and the sentiment. We expect different language in argument and description; in the first clearness only, in the other ornament also. When a man wears the dress of a person above his rank he is always

accounted a *vain coxcomb*: so when mean sentiments are clothed in a pompous style, they only serve to make them more ridiculous. We have an example of this (quoted by the author to whom I have just referred) in Dr. Smollet's history, concerning the passing of a bill for preventing clandestine marriages. "At length it floated through both houses, on the tide of a great majority, and passed safe into the port of royal approbation."

2dly. They should not be taken from objects which are mean, disgusting, or vulgar. These inevitably debase a subject instead of exalting it. So Cicero blames some orators of his time for calling his fellow citizens "*stercus curiæ.*" Tillotson is sometimes guilty of this fault when he speaks of "thrusting religion," "driving a strict bargain with God." And, speaking of the last judgment, he talks of the "*heavens cracking about our ears.*" See his sermon preached before Queen Ann, when Princess of Denmark. So Shakspeare alludes to a *dunghill*, in his Henry the Fifth, when describing the death of those who fell in France, fighting bravely in defence of their country. A similar one is introduced into one of the execrable

versions of the Psalms, which have been “done” into English verse.

“ And Sis’ra which at Endor fell,
“ As *dung* to fat the ground.”

Mr. Burke, though a writer of incomparable fancy, is very faulty in this respect.

3dly. Metaphors ought not to be “far fetched,” as it is sometimes, though not elegantly, termed; in other words, they should be clear, easy, and natural. This circumstance has not escaped the notice of Cicero, in his book *De Oratore*, who says, they ought naturally to rise from the subject. In opposition to this, Cowley is always searching where he can find the most remote connexion;* he frequently uses metaphors where the reader cannot trace the smallest resemblance; these darken the subject and bewilder by their perplexity, instead of throwing light on what was obscure. Thus when a common reader meets such a passage as this: “When the radical idea branches out into parallel ramifications, how can a consecutive series be formed of senses in their na-

* See Johnson’s *Life of Cowley*.

ture collateral," he knows not what to think ; he pauses, and is perplexed, but not instructed. You will, perhaps, think I have selected this example to show what perplexed figures may be, or that it is taken from an author remarkably dull, neither of which is the case ; you will find it in Dr. Johnson's preface to his Dictionary of the English Language. There is a metaphor equally harsh and obscure in Dr. Armstrong's Poem on Health, where he speaks of " tenacious paste of solid milk," which no ordinary reader would be likely to take for *a cheese!* Dr. Young is an author, many of whose metaphors are new, striking, and admirably conducted, and yet he is very often faulty in this respect. Mr. Addison, on the contrary, excels in his metaphors ; they seem always to arise naturally and unsought, from the very series of thought in which the subject engages him. Thomson is on the whole a chaste writer, yet the metaphors in his Seasons are often forced, and what some have called unideal : such as, " Showery radiance, breezy coolness, moving softness, refreshing breaths, dewy light, lucid coolness," &c.

4thly. We should never confound the figura-

tive and literal sense ; as when Penelope, in the *Odyssey*, complains that her son had left her without taking leave.

“ Now from my fond embrace by tempests torn,
 “ Our other column of the state is borne :
 “ Nor took a kind adieu, nor sought consent,” &c.

First Telemachus, in these lines, is made a column, and that with propriety ; but that column is blamed for not *bidding farewell* and *saluting*, which changes the column again into a person.

5thly. Metaphors should not be mixed or confounded together. Thus Shakspeare speaks of taking “ *arms* against a *sea* of troubles,” and of “ *war snarling* at the very *picked bone* of majesty,” “ *charms dissolve* apace, &c. Mr. Addison himself has fallen into this mistake. In his letter from Italy he says,

“ I bridle in my struggling Muse in vain,
 “ That longs to launch into a bolder strain.”

Here the first line is proper enough ; but when the Muse is changed from a horse to a ship, it becomes improper. It has, therefore, been given as a rule to be observed by orators, that

they ought to figure to themselves the metaphors they employ as if painted before them, and observe whether any thing would appear improper or ridiculous, if the whole was drawn by the pencil of an artist.

6thly. They ought not to be crowded or heaped one upon another. Horace is guilty of this, in joining three metaphors in a few lines, lib. ii. ode 1.

“ Motum ex Metello consule civicum

“ Bellique causas, et vitia et modos,

“ Ludumque fortunæ, gravesque

“ Principum amicitias et arma

“ Nondum expiatis uncta cruoribus :

“ Periculosæ plenum opus aleæ

“ Tractas : et incedis per ignes

“ Suppositos cineri doloso.”

“ Of warm contentions, wrathful jars,

“ The growing seeds of civil wars ;

“ Of double fortune’s cruel games,

“ The specious means, the private aims,

“ And fatal friendships of the guilty great,

“ Alas ! how fatal to the Roman state :

“ Of mighty legions late subdued,

“ And arms with Latian blood embru’d ;

“ Yet unaton’d (a labour vast,

“ Doubtful the dice, and dire the cast)

“ You treat adventurous, and incautious tread
 “ On fires with faithless embers overspread.”

FRANCIS.

Under circumstances of great agitation, however, a flow of metaphors seems allowable, and even natural. No critic, I believe, ever found the following fine passage of Shakspeare too redundant in metaphor :

“ Can'st thou not minister to a mind diseased? ”

“ Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow? ”

“ Rase out the living tablets of the brain ;

“ And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,

“ Cleanse the foul bosom of that per'lous stuff,

“ That weighs upon the heart.” MACBETH.

7thly. They should not be too far pursued. Cowley is often faulty in this respect. Shaftsbury also frequently pursues his metaphors too far ; he is so fond of embellishing his style with them, that when he has once found one to please him, he can never think of parting with it. This author, indeed, from his strained metaphors, and his inversion of language, is scarcely better understood than if he had written in Greek or Latin.

LETTER XII.

Allegory.—Allusion.—Catathresis.—Antithesis.

MY DEAR JOHN,

I HAVE already intimated that an allegory is a metaphor protracted to some considerable length. “When several kindred metaphors,” Cicero observes, “succeed one another, they alter the form of a composition; and on that account a succession of this kind is called by the Greeks an allegory; and properly, as far as relates to the etymology of the word. Aristotle, however, instead of considering it as a new species of figure, has more judiciously comprised such modes of expression under the general appellation of metaphors.”

I confess I should myself be disposed to adopt the sentiment of Aristotle, and to appropriate the term allegory to another form of composition, which I shall have presently to mention. Custom and authority have, however, decreed it otherwise, and we must therefore admit of

two kinds of allegory : the one the continued metaphor ; the other, the continued narration of a fictitious event, applied in the way of comparison to the illustration of the subject. These latter kind of allegories are called by the Greeks *αιυος*, or apologues ; by the Latins *fabulæ*, or fables ; and by the Hebrews *parables*, though the word parable is also applied to a proverbial speech or a pointed axiom. Such are the fables of Æsop and Pilpay, the Indian Sage ; such is the charming parable which I had occasion to mention in my second letter, and the still more charming narratives of our Saviour, conveyed under the name of parables. Such, in later times, is the Fairy Queen of Spenser, which consists of a series of these allegories ; and the very popular work among the common people, “ The Pilgrim’s Progress ” of Bunyan.

The first of these kinds of allegory differing only in length from the simple metaphor, there is but little necessity, after what I have observed on that subject in my last letter, to enter into the many particulars concerning its use or introduction. I must remark, however, that no figure is more delicate or difficult in the hands of a young writer. If the great difficulty

in the use of a metaphor is to preserve the allusion in all its parts, how much must the difficulty be increased in applying a series of metaphors to illustrate the same subject? In short, there is scarcely any error so common as this of forgetting the figurative and resorting to the literal sense, even in the best writers. In the following passage of Shakspeare's *King John*, the figures are grossly discordant. It relates to the projected union of the King with Constance—

“ For by this knot thou shalt so surely tie
“ Thy now unsured assurance to the crown,
“ That yon green boy shall have no sun to sip
“ The bloom that promises a mighty fruit.”

It is evident that there is no connexion between the *tying* of a *knot* and the sun's *ripening fruit*; and to heighten the absurdity, the “bloom that promises a mighty fruit,” is not on a *tree* but on a *boy*. Had the word *branch* been used instead of *boy*, this latter incongruity might have been avoided.

An allegorical couplet of Blackmore is for a similar reason well ridiculed by the authors of the art of scribbling in poetry—

“ A waving sea of heads around them spread,
 “ And still pert streams the *gazing* deluge fed.”

A crowd of people is not improperly compared to a deluge, but when *eyes* are given to this metaphorical sea, the illusion is destroyed, and the effect is ridiculous.

The absurdity even of this is however exceeded by an allegorical sentence contained in a public instrument at a time when better writing might have been expected. “ We cannot but acknowledge, to our very great sorrow and shame, that ourselves, though we hope through our weakness and frailty, not out of design, have very much contributed to those provocations which have caused *God* to depart from our Israel. But we see, when *God's* hour is come, and the time of his people's deliverance, even the set time at hand, he cometh, *skipping* over all the mountains of sins and unworthiness that we daily cast in his way,” &c.—*Monk and the Army's Address on re-assembling the Long Parliament.*

Even the ingenious and generally accurate Gibbon, is not free from these vices of composition. In his last vol. p. 640, we read, “ that

Benedict the Fourteenth consecrated a spot which *persecution* and *fable* had stained with the blood of so many Christian martyrs." Here it is evident that the two nouns, one in the figurative, and the other in the literal sense, are wholly inconsistent with each other, and destroy the metaphor or allegory, which ever it may be called ; though the author probably meant this mode of expression for a beauty.

After these instances of faulty and imperfect allegories, it is but right that I should give you an example of a good one. It is from Prior's *Henry and Emma* ; and it comes naturally from the lips of an enamoured and virtuous female—

“ Did I but purpose to embark with thee
 “ On the smooth surface of a summer's sea,
 “ While gentle zephyrs play with prosperous gales,
 “ And fortune's favour fills the swelling sails :
 “ But would forsake the ship, and make the shore,
 “ When the winds whistle, and the tempests roar ?
 “ No, Henry no ! one sacred oath has tied
 “ Our lives, one destiny our fate shall guide,
 “ Nor wild nor deep our common way divide.”

The following from Shakspeare is perhaps faulty in confounding in some measure the li-

teral with the figurative meaning, as in the fifth line. It is however very beautiful: the third line is finely descriptive—

“ This is the state of man: To day he puts forth
 “ The tender leaves of hope, to-morrow blossoms,
 “ And bears his blushing honours thick upon him:
 “ The third day comes a frost, a killing frost;
 “ And when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
 “ His greatness is a ripening—nips his root,
 “ And then he falls, &c.

HENRY VIII.

As I have shewn you also that Mr. Gibbon could commit an error in the construction of a figure, it is but fair to shew you also what he was capable of effecting when on his guard. The example I quote is from the 21st chap. of his history, a work to which I must often refer when I wish to exhibit the force of a fine imagination exerted in producing almost every beauty of style. The historian, in speaking of the speculative dissensions which existed in the Christian church at the period he is describing, adds, “ It will not be expected, it would not perhaps be endured, that I should swell this theological digression, by a minute examination of the eighteen creeds, the authors of which,

for the most part, disclaimed the odious name of their parent Arius. It is amusing enough to delineate the form, and to trace the vegetation of a singular plant; but the tedious detail of leaves without flowers, and of branches without fruit, would soon exhaust the patience, and disappoint the curiosity of the laborious student."

You will easily see that almost all the rules respecting metaphors are applicable to this kind of allegory. Dr. Blair, I must add, makes a very judicious distinction between these allegorical expressions and common metaphors. Besides the difference in point of length, "a metaphor," he observes, "always explains itself by the words that are connected with it, as when I say Achilles was a lion; an able minister is the pillar of the state; my lion and my pillar are sufficiently interpreted by the mention of Achilles and the minister, which I join to them; but an allegory is, or may be, allowed to stand more unconnected with the literal meaning, the interpretation not so directly pointed out, but left to our own reflexion."

Though confounded under the same name, the second species of allegory to which I al-

luded differs greatly from that of which we have been treating; that, I mean, which represents a subject under the colour of a fictitious narrative. The few successful attempts of this kind extant, sufficiently evince that it is a species of composition extremely difficult, and indeed it is only tolerable in the hands of a writer of the first order. Even Spencer, though abounding in all the beauties of poetry, is scarcely read, and never interests; yet I must make an exception in favour of the charming vision of Mirza, and some others in the Spectator. I may also recommend most of those in the Adventurer, from the fascinating pen of Dr. Hawksworth

You will perhaps think me hypercritical in making a distinction between the metaphor, and what I term an allusion. The latter is however a slight reference to some well-known fact or matter of history; and I think can properly class neither under the head of metaphor nor allegory. An instance which will at once explain my meaning, presents itself to my memory from a well-known song of Prior—

“ Obtain’d the chariot for a day,

“ And set the world on fire.”

A more beautiful instance is furnished by Mr. Gibbon :

“ They (the Jews) cultivated with ardour the theological system of the Athenian sage. But their national pride would have been mortified by a fair confession of their former poverty, and they boldly marked, as the sacred inheritance of their ancestors, the gold and jewels which they had so lately stolen from their Egyptian masters.”—GIBBON’S *DECLINE AND FALL*, c. 24.

The following will probably be ranked as a comparison :

“ If it be the obscure, the minute, the ceremonial part of religion for which we are contending, though the triumph be empty, the dispute is dangerous. Like the men of Ai we pursue perhaps some little party that flies before us, we are eager that not a straggler may escape ; but when we look behind, our city is in flames.”—DR. OGDEN’S *SERMONS*.

The figure called *catachresis*, which I hope I need not tell you means an *abuse* of words, is commonly no more than a violent or overstrained metaphor, as when we say of a person

for whom we have little respect, “that he *inflicted* an obligation upon us.” The vivid imagination of Mr. Burke was very fond of this figure: thus when he called the hair-brained revolutionists of France “architects of ruin,” it was certainly a catachresis; but it was a very fine one.

All these figures you will easily perceive are derived from the relation of resemblance; and as metaphysicians have connected under one head the relations of resemblance and contrariety, I think I may be allowed to conclude this letter with the notice of an important figure derived from this latter quality, I mean the *antithesis*.

The *antithesis* in general, even the serious kind, may be considered as a species of witticism, and is therefore a much more favourite figure with the moderns than with the antients. For however inferior we may be to the classical writers in other instances, in wit and humour the moderns undoubtedly excel them. The only antient writer that I know who is very fond of the antithesis, is Seneca the rhetorician, in whose compositions this figure is continually

and disgustingly introduced. Great as is my veneration for Dr. Johnson, I cannot help suspecting that he early studied in the school of Seneca, and that he there imbibed that predilection for the antithesis so conspicuous in his otherwise incomparable writings.

The French were among the first of the moderns who cultivated the antithesis. The letters of Voiture, which are very studied, and not a little affected, are full of them. It is, however, the language of compliment, and what is called "a well turned compliment," is often no more than a pointed antithesis. Thus the writer, whom I just mentioned, tells his friend Balzac, "that self-knowledge, which was a cause of humility to other men, must with him have a quite contrary effect."

Antitheses seem to have been introduced, at least the abuse of them, into the English language in the time of Charles II. With other species of false wit they pervaded all the eloquence of the day. Even the pulpit was not free from them, and we are often disgusted with the harsh antithesis of South; take for example one sentence—

"These were notions not descending from

us, but born with us; not our offspring, but our brethren; and (as I may so say) such as were taught without the help of a teacher."

There are hardly any rules to be observed respecting the introduction and the use of antitheses; your own taste and discretion must be your only guides. I may however in the first place remark, that as they always appear the effect of study, they are never natural in impassioned language. On the stage, therefore, they are seldom introduced with propriety, as they are neither the suitable expression of passion, nor can be supposed to occur naturally in conversation. As they do not accord with the passionate, and are efforts too minute for the sublime, it forms an objection against that inimitable poem, the *Night Thoughts*, that it abounds too much with this figure. The sublimity of the following lines is destroyed by the epigrammatic turn—

“ Even silent night proclaims my soul immortal,

“ Even silent night proclaims eternal day :

“ For human weal Heaven husbands all events,

“ Dull sleep instructs, nor sport vain dreams in vain.”

In those compositions, however, where we expect the sport of fancy, and which may be

supposed to have cost the author some study, the effect of a spirited antithesis is considerable; and the less studied it appears the better. The two following (both from the same author) are natural and easy:

“The use of the dagger is seldom adopted in public councils, as long as they retain any confidence in the power of the sword.”—GIBBON’S HISTORY, c. 25.

“In the horrid massacre of Thessalonica, the cruel Rufinus inflamed the fury without imitating the repentance of Theodosius.”—IBID.

Writers of genius, it is true, sometimes unite the pathetic, and even the sublime, with this figure, as in the following instances from Dr. Johnson:

“Wherever the eye is turned it sees much misery, and there is much which it sees not; many complaints are heard, and there are many pangs without complaint.”—SERMONS.

In speaking of the pride of talents also—
“The time will come, it will come quickly, when it shall profit us more to have subdued one proud thought, than to have numbered the host of heaven.”—IBID.

We should observe, as a 2d rule, to be-

ware of their too frequent introduction ; for a reader may tire even of brilliancy. Beautiful as the compositions of Dr. Johnson are, I have sometimes felt a sameness in them ; a number of sentences ending in the same way, and reading almost like a chapter in the book of Proverbs. Mr. Gibbon is also too fond of antitheses ; the figure is indeed better suited to discussion than to narrative.

3dly. The antithesis should rather be in things than in words, and should not only have contrast but ingenuity to recommend it. A late writer on education puts in opposition “ a *false* quantity and a *false* assertion.” This is too much like a pun.

In few words the antithesis, like every figure, receives animation and elegance from the hand of genius ; but nothing can be more frigid than a string of trite antitheses from a dull writer. I would much rather have plain fact, and plain truth, from such authors, than the affectation of wit and elegance. The imitators of Dr. Johnson have miserably failed, not because they were unable to ape his manner, but because they wanted the solidity of his observation, and the brilliancy of his fancy.

LETTER XIII.

Metonymy.—*Synecdoche*—*Periphrasis*—*Personification.* — *Apostrophe.* — *Hyperbole.*—*Irony.*

MY DEAR JOHN,

NOT to detain you much longer in the rudiments of rhetoric, I shall proceed without preface to those figures, which are derived from the other relations of cause and effect, and contiguity.

You need not be informed that the word *metonymy* implies a *change of name*, or, in other words, the substitution of some characteristic circumstance or quality for the name or word by which a thing is usually known.

It is chiefly, I might almost say entirely, from the relation of cause and effect that this figure is derived. Thus the cause is put for the effect, when the inventor's name is used for the thing invented. Instead of a serious example, take one that will amuse you better, from the treatise on the Bathos—

“ Lac'd in her Cosins* new appear'd the bride,
 “ A *bubble-boy* † and *Tompion* ‡ at her side,
 “ And with an air divine her Colmar|| ply'd:
 “ Then oh! she cries, what slaves I round me see;
 “ Here a bright red-coat, there a smart *toupee*.”§

Agreeably to this figure, the author's name is employed to designate his works; as when I say “ I have read Homer, Virgil, or Milton,” for the works of Homer, &c.; and this is so common, that it is no harsh expression to say “ I have read such a writer.”

“ Trojani belli scriptorem, maxime Lolli,
 “ Dum tu declamas Romæ, Præneste relegi.”

HOR. EP. 2.

“ While you my Lollius on some chosen theme,
 “ With youthful eloquence at Rome declaim,
 “ I read the Grecian poet o'er again.”

FRANCIS.

Again the effect or instrument is employed for the cause as “ the tongue (that is the eloquence of Cicero) defended the cause of virtue and the republic;” “ *Pallida mors*” (in Ho-

* Stays. † Tweezer case. ‡ Watch. || Fan.
 § A head-dress. All names taken, I believe, from eminent workmen or dealers in those articles.

race) for death that makes pale. The adjunct is used for the substantive, as when we speak of the *fasces* for the magistrate; and Virgil says, “*bibit Germania Tigrim*,” mentioning the country for the inhabitants. In short, it is unnecessary to multiply instances, as metonymies occur in every page of every book, and in almost every sentence of conversation.

I need not remind you that the *synecdoche* (or *figure of comprehension*,) according to old Farnaby, “takes the whole for the part, or the part for the whole,” as the genus for the species, or the species for the genus; and is of consequence, evidently dependant on the same relation: thus a man is said to get his *bread* by his labour, when bread is taken to signify the whole of subsistence.

The circumstance which forms the principal difficulty of translation is, that metaphors, metonymies, and synecdoches, are often intranslatable; and the corresponding words are, in the new language, often trite or obscure.

The *periphrasis* is a metonymy in which more words than usual are employed, as when we speak of “the Lover of Daphne,” to designate Apollo. Mr. Gibbon raises his style

very beautifully by the use of this figure. It is also common with the Orientals, as “the son of Nouraddin,” instead of the proper name of the person.

One of the most animated figures, when properly introduced, and managed with delicacy and judgment, is the *prosopopœia* or personification. It has some alliance with the metaphor, but still more with the metonymy; and indeed seems in most cases to the latter what the allegory is to the metaphor. Thus, when we say “Youth and beauty are laid in the dust,” it is not easy to determine whether it is a metonymy or a *prosopopœia*. This figure is the soul of poetry, and of lyric poetry in particular. It

“ Gives to airy nothing

“ A local habitation and a name.”

In a production of an excellent poetess of our own times, there is a very fine specimen of this figure, as well as of most of the beauties of poetry—

“ Loud howls the storm, the vex'd Atlantic roars,

“ Thy genius, Britain, wanders on its shores!

“ Hears cries of horror wafted from afar,

“ The groans of anguish 'mid the shrieks of war!

" Hears the deep curses of the great and brave,
 " Sigh in the wind, and murmur in the wave !
 " O'er his damp brow the sable crape he binds,
 " And throws his victor garland to the winds."

MISS SEWARD'S MONODY ON MAJ. ANDRE.

In all the lyric poems of Collins, you will find very fine examples of the prosopopœia. None perhaps more pleasing than the opening of his Ode to Mercy—

" O thou, who sit'st a smiling bride
 " By valour's arm'd and awful side,
 " Gentlest of sky-born forms, and best adored—
 " Who oft with songs, divine to hear,
 " Win'st from his fatal grasp the spear,
 " And hid'st in wreaths of flow'rs his bloodless sword."
 " Thou, who, amidst the deathful field,
 " By godlike chiefs alone beheld,
 " Oft with thy bosom bare art found,
 " Pleading for him, the youth who sinks to ground."

Here are two very fine pictures, the embodied quality or character in two most interesting situations.

There is another striking instance in a contemporary poet, which is also accompanied with a fine allusion. You will recollect the lines are addressed to Mr. Gibbon—

“ Humility herself, divinely mild,
 “ Sublime religion’s meek and modest child,
 “ Like the dumb son of Cræsus, in the strife,
 “ When force assail’d his father’s sacred life,
 “ Breaks silence, and with filial duty warm,
 “ Bids thee revere her parent’s hallowed form !”

HAYLEY’S ESSAY ON HISTORY.

But though personification is particularly adapted to poetry, yet this figure serves frequently to adorn the works of the best prose writers. I have seldom found a bolder instance than one in Tacitus, An. 16. 21—

“ Trucidatis tot insignibus viris, ad postremum Nero virtutem ipsam excindere concupivit, interfecto Thrasea,” &c.

“ After the slaughter of so many distinguished men, Nero meditated at length the extirpation of virtue herself, by the murder of Thrasea.”

Dr. Ogden, who is so fertile in beauties that I am obliged to have continual recourse to him, will also furnish us with another example—

“ Truth (says he) is indeed of an awful presence, and must never be affronted with the rudeness of direct opposition ; yet will she consent for a moment to pass unregarded, while

your respects are offered to her sister charity.”

The use of the abstract for the concrete, as treachery, for treacherous men ; modesty, for modest men, &c. is a kind of personification, and adds greatly to the animation of a discourse, as in this instance from Junius's Letters—

“ As for Mr. W——n, there is something in him which even treachery cannot trust.”

Much of the spirit of Dr. Johnson's compositions depends upon this artful use of language ; and he is, I think, improperly censured for it, by a gentleman, whose lively talents and genuine humour have often engaged and interested the first assembly in this kingdom, and who favoured the public with an excellent criticism in verse on that great man's character and writings.

The 1st rule to be observed with respect to the prosopopœia is, that whenever it is introduced, the picture it presents should be complete. For this reason the following example is perfectly ridiculous—

“ Invidious *grave*, how dost thou *rend in sunder*

“ Whom love has knit, and sympathy made one.”

BLAIR'S GRAVE.

The idea of a *grave rending in sunder*, you see makes a very indifferent picture. I should not however have quoted this poem, had it not been made a subject of panegyric by a modern critic, whose genius is at least equal to his eccentricity.

2dly. Mean and vulgar objects should never be personified: for as the *prosopopœia* is a bold figure, it should only be introduced to confer dignity on a subject. It follows of course that nothing vulgar or contemptible should be allowed to disgrace the figure. For this reason the following image from the poem I have just quoted, is not only unpoetical, but disgusting—

——— “ O great *man-eater*!

“ Whose every day is carnival, not sated yet!

“ Like one whole days defrauded of his meals,

“ On whom lank *hunger* lays his *skinny* hand.”

Here are two personifications, and the imagery, as well as the language in both, is as mean and colloquial as possible. The same want of dignity, and the same impropriety, pervade all the imagery of this writer. For instance—

“ Now tame and humble, like a child that's whipt,
“ Shake hands with dust.”

Here is another most extraordinary picture, “ a man skaking hands with dust.” Such writers are of use, because they teach us better than any precept can, what to avoid.

3dly. I do not subscribe to Dr. Blair's rule, “ that this figure should never be attempted but when prompted by strong passion ;” for in the happiest instances I have already given, there is no passion at all. Indeed it seems to me more a figure of fancy than of passion, and it is most happily introduced in those compositions where the fancy sports most uncontrouled, as in lyric productions. In very serious compositions, however, it is sometimes well introduced accompanied with passion ; but then the effect will be destroyed if it appears artificial ; for all art is inconsistent with strong emotion.

The *apostrophe* is a more animated prosopœia, where the object personified is addressed in the second person. A real personage, however, may be addressed in an apostrophe, but he must be supposed either dead or absent ; which almost reduces it to a mere personifica-

tion. It is a figure more fit for poetry than prose; and nothing can excuse it in the latter but the very effervescence of passion. On this account, though it may be tolerated in oratory, it cannot be admitted in narrative or didactic compositions. In truth, the French preachers, who are very partial to this figure, render their discourses sometimes exceedingly frigid, by its too frequent and artificial introduction.

The apostrophe never was more properly and naturally introduced than in Lear's address to the elements, when discarded and turned out by Regan. There is a peculiar beauty in this part—

————— “ Spite fire, spout rain !

“ Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters.

“ I tax not you, ye elements, with unkindness,

“ I never gave you kingdom, called you children,

“ You owe me no subscription,” &c. “

That of Eve in the 11th book of Paradise Lost, v. 269, is also beautiful and proper—

“ O unexpected stroke, worse than of death !

“ Must I thus leave thee, Paradise, thus leave

“ Thee, native soil, these happy walks and shades,

“ Fit haunt of Gods? Where I had hope to spend,

" Quiet, though sad, the respite of that day
 " That must be mortal to us both. O flowers
 " That never will in other climate grow,
 " My early visitation and my last
 " At even, which I bred up with tender hand,
 " From the first opening bud, and gave you names;
 " Who now shall rear ye to the sun, or rank
 " Your tribes, and water from th' ambrosial fount?" &c.

I have already laid down one rule concerning the use of this figure, which is, that it is only adapted to impassioned expression, otherwise its introduction is frigid, if not ridiculous. I may add, as a second rule, that it should always be made with gravity and dignity. The following instance is a breach of both these rules—

——— " But tell us, why this waste,
 " Why this *ado* in *earthing* up a carcase
 " That's fall'n into disgrace, and to the sense
 " Smells horrible? Ye *Undertakers!* tell us."

BLAIR'S GRAVE.

The *hyperbole* is nothing more than an excess of figurative language; the effect, when it is natural, of passion. All the passions are inclined to magnify their objects. Injuries seem greater than they really are to those who have received

them ; and dangers, to those who are in fear. The lover naturally makes a divinity of his mistress ; valour and contempt are equally inclined to degrade and diminish. This figure, therefore, in particular, requires passion to give it force or propriety ; and if this is not the case, it renders a style very bombastic and frigid. Lucan is too fond of this figure. See the first six lines of Rowe's Lucan, where

“ The sun——

“ —— sicken'd, to behold Emathia's plain,

“ And would have sought the backward east again.”

And in book vi. v. 329—

“ The missive arms fix'd all around he wears,

“ And even his safety in his wounds he bears,

“ Fenc'd with a fatal wood, a deadly grove of spears.”

Nothing indeed can be more bombastic than the whole description of this warrior's death. The poet calls upon the Pompeians to lay siege to him as they would to a town ; to bring battering engines, flames, racks, &c. to subdue him. He is first compared to an elephant, and again to a hunted boar ; at length—

“ When none were left him to repel,

“ Fainting for want of foes the victor fell.”

The above instances may serve to shew how easily the hyperbolical style may slide into the ridiculous. The last of them is only surpassed by one which is quoted by the authors of the *Bathos*—

“ He roar’d so loud, and look’d so wondrous grim,
“ His very shadow durst not follow him.”

Or another from the same assemblage of humour. The poet is speaking of a frightened stag, who

“ Hears his own feet, and thinks they sound like more,
“ And fears the hind feet will o’ertake the fore.”

One more I cannot help transcribing. It is the description of that elegant entertainment a bull-baiting, by Sir Richard Blackmore—

“ *Up to the stars* the sprawling mastiffs fly,
“ And add new monsters to the *frighted sky*.”

Nothing in short can be more fertile in the ridiculous than the awkward attempts of bad writers at the hyperbole. On this account, I can give you no better rule with respect to the use of it, than to employ it as little as possible.

Irony has been classed as a figure of rhetoric by Farnaby, and other writers of equal taste

and brilliancy ; but with deference to such high authorities, I would rather consider it as a style of writing than as a figure of speech. Dr. Priestley observes, that “ all irony is humour, but all humour is not irony.” In other words, irony is a species of humour, and if you will attend to the definition of humour, which I attempted in Letter VI. viz. that it depends upon the same principle of contrast as wit ; but that in humour, the mind of the reader or auditor is left to make the comparison for itself, and form the contrast ; you will find that it strictly applies to irony. This figure (if a figure we must call it) generally consists in giving undeserved praise, implying censure on the object ; or conveying censure under the appearance of praise ; but the former is the most common. I remember however a very pretty stroke of irony of the latter kind. When the King of Prussia, Frederic II. published his poem on the art of war, he took no notice of Marlborough. On this circumstance, the Monthly Reviewers remarked, “ that they presumed his Majesty had omitted the name of Marlborough, in the catalogue of distinguished commanders, because he might deem him deficient in one branch of his

profession, having never on any occasion evinced his skill in *conducting a retreat.*”

The greatest master in irony is Swift; and his “Tale of a Tub” is the most complete specimen extant of ironical composition. To select examples would be to transcribe almost half the book. Take therefore the first that occurs in the “Dedication to Prince Posterity.”

“To affirm that our age is altogether unlearned, and devoid of writers of any kind, seems to be an assertion so bold and false, that I have been sometime thinking, the contrary may almost be proved by uncontrollable demonstration. It is true indeed, that although their numbers be vast, and their productions numerous in proportion, yet are they hurried so hastily off the scene, that they escape our memory, and elude our sight.”

“What is then become of those immense bales of paper, which must needs have been employed in such numbers of books; can these also be wholly annihilated, and so of a sudden as I pretend? What shall I say in return to so invidious an objection; it ill befits the distance between your highness and me, to send you for ocular demonstration to a jakes or an oven;

to the windows of a bawdy-house, or to a sordid lantern. Books, like men their authors, have no more than one way of coming into the world, but there are ten thousand to go out of it, and return no more."

The force and delicacy of this irony may be easily understood without a comment. The sarcastic author, passes a most severe censure on his contemporaries, under the colour of a very moderate and well-conducted defence.

Let it be observed that more exaggerated praise, even though it evidently appears extravagant, and meant for ridicule, is not irony. To constitute that, there must be a sarcastic archness, which, if not actual wit, must very nearly approach it, and must at least be humour. I shall conclude with the finest specimen of this figure extant in any language—

“ HERE continueth to rot

The Body of

FRANCIS CHARTRES,

Who with an INFLEXIBLE CONSTANCY,

And INIMITABLE UNIFORMITY of Life,

PERSISTED,

In spite of AGE and INFIRMITIES,

In the Practice of EVERY HUMAN VICE,
 Excepting PRODIGALITY and HYPOCRISY:
 His insatiable AVARICE exempted him from the first,
 His matchless IMPUDENCE from the second.

Nor was he more singular
 In the undeviating *Pravity* of his *Manners*,
 Than successful

In *Accumulating* WEALTH:

For, without TRADE or PROFESSION,
 Without TRUST of PUBLIC MONEY,
 And without BRIBE-WORTHY Service,
 He acquired, or more properly created,
 'A MINISTERIAL ESTATE.

He was the only Person of his Time
 Who could CHEAT without the MASK of HONESTY,
 Retain his Primæval MEANNESS

When possess'd of TEN THOUSAND a year;
 And having daily deserved the GIBBET for what he *did*,
 Was at last condemn'd to it for what he *could* not *do*.

Oh Indignant Reader!

Think not his Life useless to Mankind;
 PROVIDENCE conniv'd at his execrable Designs,
 To give to After-ages

A conspicuous PROOF and EXAMPLE,
 Of how small Estimation is EXORBITANT WEALTH
 In the Sight of GOD,
 By his bestowing it on the most UNWORTHY of ALL
 MORTALS."

A figure which the Greeks call *paraleipsis*,

borders upon irony, and is sometimes united with it. From the name you will perceive that it implies an affectation of omission, as when an orator exclaims, "I refrain from touching on the rapacity, the venality, the exceeding corruption of the person I accuse; I confine myself to the point," &c. Cicero makes a very free use of this figure; and the late Mr. Burke, who made that great master his model, was particularly fond of it.

Dr. Blair has enumerated two or three other forms of expression as figures of rhetoric; and that I may not leave this sketch imperfect, I shall conclude this letter with a short notice of them. The first of these is *interrogation*, of which (he observes) we have many fine instances in the poetical and prophetic parts of Scripture—"God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it?" The effect of this mode of expression will be very evident, if the sense is preserved, and the words thrown out of this interrogative form. "What he hath said he will do, and what he hath spoken he will make good." Also in St. Matthew, ch. xi. v. 7 and 9. "And as they de-

parted, he began to say unto the multitude concerning John. What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? but what went ye out for to see; a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold they that wear soft raiment are in kings' houses: but what went ye out for to see? A prophet, yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet."

Exclamation is a stronger figure than the former. The best rule that can be given with regard to it, is, that you should attend to the manner in which the passion you describe would naturally vent itself. The figure must be seldom used, as it will appear very ridiculous, unless where the passions of the hearers are much inflamed.

The same author observes, that some writers fill their books with points of admiration! as if the points were sufficient to produce that passion by a magical power, when their sentiments are perfectly frigid. Nearly allied to this is another trick, which has been much employed by modern authors, i. e. filling their writings with black lines, as if every sentence was so important as to deserve applause. Dr. Blair calls this a typographical figure, and it

is well adapted to some contemptible writers, and that herd of novelists, who have nothing either in their matter or style to attract attention. There was another custom used not long ago, which modern writers have justly laid aside ; they wrote every word which they thought emphatic in Italic characters. Though this may be very proper with respect to some very energetic words, yet the too frequent use of them only dazzles the sight, without informing the understanding.

Dr. Blair remarks also another figure, which he calls *vision*, by which we describe a thing that is past or absent as if passing immediately before our eyes : by it we place things in a very lively manner before our readers, an example of which may be found in Cicero's fourth oration against Catiline. " Cum vero mihi proposui regnantem Lentulum," &c. It is not easy to give any rules concerning the management of this figure ; it requires, indeed, great caution, and its use ought to be almost exclusively restricted to very passionate orations.

Repetition is another animated figure remarked by the same writer ; by this we repeat the most material words of a sentence, in order to

make the impression the stronger. There is an example of this in Virgil, when Orpheus laments his lost wife Eurydice—

“ Te, dulcis conjux te, solo in littore secum

“ Te, venienté die, te decedente canebat.”

To the same purpose Mr Pope—

“ By foreign hands thy dying eyes were clos'd,

“ By foreign hands thy decent limbs compos'd,

“ By foreign hands thy humble grave adorn'd,

“ By strangers honour'd and by strangers mourn'd.”

The finest instance of this is, however, in St. Paul's 2d Epistle to the Corinthians, ch. xi. v. 22. “ Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they the ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.”

I have already treated of the *climax* in a former letter; all that is necessary to remark here is, that it is commonly classed as a figure of rhetoric.

LETTER XIV.

General observations on Composition.

MY DEAR JOHN,

I HAVE endeavoured to give you as correct a notion as I can of all the figures of rhetoric which deserve the name. To enter into the minuteness of Farnaby would be trifling, and only perplex. There was scarcely a form or idiom of language for which the Greeks did not invent a name; and it is to be lamented that much of their science consisted only in giving names.

Even in what I have done, I fear you will apply to me the remark of Butler, formerly quoted. Yet let it be remembered, that it is at least an accomplishment to know how literary men, both ancient and modern, have specified and defined the various modes of expression.

I shall have frequently to call your attention to something of more importance than style, the matter and form of the different species of com-

position. Yet even here what has been advanced on the subject of style will not be found useless. Independent of those qualities which every good style ought to possess—perspicuity, purity, and harmony—you will have to apply much of what I have advanced to the different kinds of composition of which we are now to treat. It is evident that some will be improved by an ornamental or florid style; that in others, figurative language must be sparingly employed, while on some subjects it would be an absolute vice.

All kinds of composition may be classed under two general divisions: prose, and poetry; and it will be most natural and easy to treat in the first instance of the former.

Prose compositions may again be arranged in the following classes: 1st. Didactic and argumentative; 2d. Oratorical; 3d. Narrative and descriptive. The first will comprehend every thing relating to moral, political, or natural philosophy; all treatises on the arts or sciences; all discussions or controversies, which do not come under the second division of the oratorical or declamatory. The second division will in-

clude not only the three great branches of oratory—the senate, the bar, and the pulpit; but also much of controversy, political pamphlets, and every thing that assumes a declamatory form. The letters of Junius, though under the epistolary title, may be classed as political declamations.

The last division will extend not only to real but fictitious history, memoirs, books of travels, and even many compositions which rank as essays, but which are in reality either narratives or descriptions. The three kinds will be found sometimes blended in one production, as in Thucydides and Livy will be found almost as much of oratory as of mere narrative; though this is a style of composition which I would not recommend.

It is obvious, that in didactic or argumentative compositions, works of reasoning; a florid or figurative style is very improperly introduced: yet in what are called moral essays, such as the Spectators, Ramblers, and Adventurers, a style moderately florid is far from misplaced. The truth is, these productions partake more or less of the nature either of poetry or

oratory. They are in a great measure works of imagination, and therefore the ornaments of fancy are not improperly bestowed upon them.

There are few productions of the narrative kind which will not admit of ornament. The antient historians are, however, rather more chaste in this respect, except where they professedly introduce an oration. Books of travels are mostly descriptive; and description admits of even more ornament than narrative. It indeed approaches to poetry, and almost admits of equal licence.

But of all the different kinds of prose composition, oratory admits of the greatest variety of ornament. It allows occasionally of almost all the figures which are appropriated to poetry, and of some almost peculiar to itself. It is, therefore, to this branch of composition that the art of rhetoric particularly applies; and the antient rhetoricians were mere teachers of oratory.

In treating critically of the different kinds of composition, both prose and verse, I shall have to enforce more particularly these observations. In the mean time, as this letter is of a miscellaneous character, I shall conclude it with

few practical rules, which you will find useful in the acquisition of a good style; some from my own practice and observation, and some from other authors.

1st. As we have been treating so lately of figurative language, my first observation will apply to it. Never be anxious to embellish your compositions in this way. Never study to find out comparisons or metaphors to adorn your discourse. Figurative language, when it is good, comes spontaneously from a lively imagination, or from a mind richly stored by the perusal of the best authors.

2d. Avoid common-place metaphors. Nothing can be more disgusting than an accumulation of trite and common allusions. The plainest style is preferable; and figures to be pleasing should always have something ingenious and uncommon to recommend them. Such a style as I have now been deprecating, is always frigid, and commonly characterized as fustian or bombast.

3d. To write well you should study to acquire a clear idea of the subject. Some may suppose that this has no connection with style; but the case is otherwise, for unless you under-

stand what you write upon, you can never make others understand you. When you are to write, you are to reflect upon all the parts of the subject; and when you have acquired a clear view of it, the words will come of course, though probably they will admit of much amendment. Do not however stop the ardour of composition for the sake of a single word or phrase, but leave it a blank when a proper one does not occur, or rather take the word that presents itself, and mark it to be afterwards corrected.

4th. You should often compose. No rules are sufficient to form a complete and correct writer without exercise and habit. I do not mean that you should compose *much*; on the contrary, by writing too fast at first you may contract bad habits, which will require much trouble before they can be removed. Endeavour therefore to write well, rather than fast. When you have done, lay by the composition till you have forgotten your attachment to any particular phrase in it, and afterwards survey it with a critical eye; you will then be more able to prune redundances, and to smooth the periods.

5th. I again repeat, peruse the best authors with a particular attention to their style. By this means you will lay in a store of words, and insensibly adopt their modes of expression. Take care to mark every thing peculiar in their manner, so that you may know how afterwards either to adopt or to avoid it.

6th. There is no practice better than to translate passages from good classical authors, or to give the thoughts of a good writer in your own language, and compare it afterwards carefully with the original. Take, for instance, a passage from Addison or Blair; read it three or four times, and when you have made yourself master of all the sentiments, lay aside the book, and clothe them in your own language; then compare your own performance, after you have rendered it as correct as possible, with the original: by this means you will be able to discover your own faults.

7th. Avoid all servile imitation of others; for by imitation you will be prevented from attempting any thing of your own, and your barrenness will at length be discovered. Never transcribe passages from other writers as your own: this effectually bars all efforts of genius,

and exposes you to the ridicule of men of learning.

8th. Always endeavour to adapt the style to the subject; for nothing can be more ridiculous than to clothe grave subjects in a vain and gaudy dress; or embellish dry reasoning, which must convince only by strength of argument. In oratorical compositions you must also adapt your discourse to the generality of your audience: nothing can be more absurd than to use extravagant phrases, or unknown words, before an unlearned multitude; the ignorant may admire, but the learned will smile.

9th. Give at all times more attention to your thoughts than to your words. We may learn almost mechanically a few fine phrases; but in a man of true genius alone the sentiments are grand and noble.

I do not mean, however, to discourage you from the cultivation of a good style. The remark of Quintilian, "that a clear conception will generally be attended with correct expression" is so far true, that we know the knowledge of words always accompanies the knowledge of things; and as almost all our knowledge is acquired by means of words, we cannot have

the one without the other. Otherwise the attainment of arts and sciences appears to me a perfectly distinct branch of study, and I can conceive a man master of even a practical art, such as chemistry or mechanics, and to want names for his ideas. However, thus far is certain, that the elegant part of speaking or writing is at least a distinct study, and therefore not to be neglected; though it will be found of little value without a sound knowledge of things.

LETTER XV.

Didactic Composition—Analysis and Synthesis.

MY DEAR JOHN,

IN my last letter I promised to conduct you from words to things ; from style to the matter and arrangement of composition. In pursuing the order also which I before pointed out, we are to consider didactic composition.

I do not know a greater difficulty than that which presents itself to a young writer with respect to the method or arrangement which he is to pursue in an essay or discourse on any given subject. Ideas crowd upon his mind ; he sees the subject in various points of view ; but he is uncertain what observation ought first to be introduced to the notice of his reader, or in what light his subject will appear the clearest, and to the most advantage. Here the rules of art may occasionally deliver him from some embarrassment ; and at least a general process

may be laid down as the means of investigating truth, or communicating knowledge.

Logicians have established, and I think not improperly, two methods in which didactic or argumentative disquisitions are to be conducted. These methods are *analysis* and *synthesis*. The analytical method is when we proceed from particulars to the establishment of some general truth. Thus Derham, in his physico-theology, ascends from the investigation of the several parts of nature, to the proof that they must be the work of an all powerful and intelligent being. Dr. Clarke, on the contrary, in his admirable work on the being and attributes of God, commences with a simple proposition, that "something must have existed from eternity; he proceeds to shew what must have been the nature and attributes of such a being, and by the force of this one fundamental axiom, establishes all the principles which are the basis of natural, I might add of revealed religion.

A similar method is adopted in Warburton's *Divine Legation*, a work however which I never admired. The foundation of this work is laid in a kind of syllogism, though I confess I cannot see that the consequence flows naturally from

the major and the minor. It is, 1st. That the doctrine of a future state is necessary to the well-being of civil society, and therefore was taught by the wisest legislators of antiquity. 2d. That this doctrine makes no part of the Mosaic dispensation. 3dly. That therefore the law of Moses is of divine original.

The learned author has, in my opinion, failed in the proof of all his propositions; but it is enough to remark at present, that he branches this syllogism out into five volumes, adducing an infinite number of authorities and facts under each of the separate heads.

The analytical method is the only mode in which truth is to be investigated; for this reason it is the method adopted in algebraic investigations, and in those of experimental philosophy, where the author, from comparing the number of particular observations, and tracing the analogy between them, arrives at a general conclusion.*

* In this manner truths of the greatest importance are gradually laid open to persons whose curiosity is deeply interested in the process. -Nor is the full design of the philosopher perceived by his antagonist, until the conclusion, which he aims to establish, strikes at last with irre-

Where a science is to be taught, on the contrary, the synthetic seems the most commodious method, and it is therefore that which is adopted by geometricians. With these, therefore, a theorem or proposition is laid down, and is then proved or demonstrated. Sermons, except those which follow the order of the text, and a majority of what are called moral essays, are in the synthetical form; though it is not often that we find either of these modes separately pursued.

In works where it is the object of the writers to take their readers by surprise, and to establish a false conclusion, they find the analytical method to answer their purpose the best; for the chain of reasoning ascending from particulars to generals is often complicated, and the connexion of it with the conclusion is not easily discovered. Dr. Priestley observes, that the most valuable part of Mr. Hume's "Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals," is nearly the same as that part of Mr. Hutchinson's moral philosophy, which corresponds to it, and

sistible evidence upon the mind.—OGILVIE ON COMPOSITION.

may most properly be termed analytical. In order to determine the foundation of virtue, he considers particularly every thing that is acknowledged to gain the esteem of mankind, examining upon what common property their encomiums turn, and in what manner their approbation is bestowed; and having found that nothing is the object of esteem but what is *useful to society*, and that the several virtues are classed in the first and second rank of importance, according as they are more or less essential to the well-being of society, he concludes that *public utility* is the foundation of all moral virtue.

In Dr. Hartley's observations on man, on the contrary, the argument is strictly synthetical, and even geometrical. The author begins with definitions and axioms, such as are employed by geometers; he lays down formal propositions, and advances such proof as the nature of the case will admit. He deduces formal *corollaries* from almost every proposition; in the *scholia* he explains the nature of his proofs, and shews in what manner evidence is reflected from one part to another.

I do not know any study more improving to

young persons than to mark and consider the manner in which a great author conducts a disquisition ; for there is frequently not less force and power in the arrangement than in the matter and arguments themselves.

The Republic of Plato is a very celebrated work ; and a short abstract, or rather outline, of it, may possibly entertain you. The work is in dialogue ; but as there is only one principal speaker, Socrates, it may be regarded as a disquisition. The professed intention of the author is to describe and define the nature of justice ; this he does by a fanciful analogy, in the tracing of which he pursues the analytical method. He founds an imaginary city, and shews the advantage of each person practising some art which may be useful to the community, and practising that alone. He then divides his city into three classes : 1st. Those who pursue the arts of husbandry, mechanics, &c. 2d. The military, or a few chosen for the defence of the rest. 3d. The magistrates and counsellors, who are to administer the laws and regulate the police. This therefore is the order of the city ; but if one class (says he) should infringe on the proper business of the other, if

the artizans or soldiers, being unskilled in the arts of governing, should pretend to rule, confusion and the dissolution of the state is the necessary consequence; and this constitutes the political nature of injustice.

In like manner man is endued with certain faculties, appetites and passions, the end of which is the general good of the whole; and these may be divided into three classes—the appetitive, the irascible, and the reasonable; answering to the three classes constituted in the city. The rational is the governing and consultive power, and the irascible is the defensive, and is properly the guard and confederate to it. If, then, at any time the appetitive should assume the superiority, or the irascible part would subject every thing to his sway, the harmony is broken, and the man, of consequence, will act unjustly, &c. *Αρετή μὲν ἀρα ὡς εἰσικεν, ὑγίεια τε τις ἀν εἶη καὶ κάλλος καὶ εὐεξία ψυχῆς, κακία δὲ νόσος τε καὶ αἰσχος καὶ ἀσθενεία.* “For virtue (says he) is the health and beauty, and sound constitution of the soul; vice, on the contrary, is disease, and barrenness, and debility.”—REP. book iv.

Though I read much of Plato in my youth, I do not recommend to you to spend much

time upon him. I remember he was far from satisfying either my friend Gilbert Wakefield or myself, when we read him. He abounds too much in minute and metaphysical distinctions, which are of little value, and can only be accounted in general a most elegant and ingenious trifler. Yet candour ought to make allowances for the age in which he lived. He was a divine, while totally ignorant of a true system of theology; and a moralist in a time when human nature was depraved by the grossest prejudices and perversions. Had the light of Christianity but dawned upon his mind, he would have been the first of philosophers. He would probably not have lost himself in the mist of idle speculation, but would have pursued the star which drew the sages from the East; like them he would have worshipped, not with an idolatrous adoration, but "in spirit and in truth."

If I recollect rightly, the analytical method is pursued in almost all the dialogues of Plato. It seems indeed the only method that can be followed with success whenever the Socratic mode of reasoning (that which draws a conclusion from the concessions of your adversary) is

employed. It is often a very pleasing method of inculcating truth, for the curiosity of the hearer or reader becomes frequently deeply interested in the process. The full design of the speaker is not perceived until the conclusion he aims to establish strikes with irresistible force upon the mind.

But however useful the analytical method may be where a prejudice is to be removed, or a new truth presented to the mind, still in works purely didactic or preceptive, the synthetic is the simplest, and the most readily comprehended.

In all disquisitions, or argumentative or didactic works, method and arrangement is of almost as much importance as either the matter or the style. The *lucidus ordo* is recommended by the earliest critics; and the remark of Pliny ought to be impressed upon the mind of every young writer, that “Even barbarians can express themselves with force and brilliancy; but to arrange with propriety, and dispose with elegance the parts of a work, is the task only of the learned.”* Never therefore sit down to

* “Utinam ordo saltem & transitus & figuræ simul spectarentur. Nam invenire præclare & enunciare mag-

write before you have well digested in your mind the plan and order of what you intend. It is even useful to commit to writing a sketch of the method in which you mean to pursue your subject. This is indeed necessary to perfection in any art; for a good painter always makes certain of a good and correct outline or design, before he sits down to fill up the various lights and shades of the picture.

The talent of methodizing, and that of eliciting detached, though brilliant thoughts, are talents entirely different. The latter is the operation of fancy, with little assistance from the reasoning power; the former is the act of a mind of large powers, and of extensive views of things.

There are two modes of composing, which are occasionally adopted according to the nature of the work, or the genius of the author. The first is when a number of thoughts, which have occurred at different times, but relating to the same subject, have been carefully noted down, and are afterwards arranged and polished at the leisure of the writer. The other

nificé, interdum barbari solent: *disponere apté*, varié nisi eruditus negatum est.—PLINY, EP. L. 3. E. 13.

mode is, when the writer having, with much reading and reflection, made himself master of the subject, prosecutes the work in a connected order, and writes what spontaneously occurs to his mind. Each of these modes supposes a plan; but in the former case the plan seems to arise out of the materials which have been originally collected, perhaps without much regard to method, and is formed by diligently comparing and digesting them in the order in which they will appear to most advantage. In the other case, the writer follows a plan already conceived, and perhaps even laid down upon paper. Treatises composed in this way, therefore, are more connected, and the parts harmonize with each other much better than in the former case.

In large works, however, and especially in compilations, it is necessary to make collections, though it should not be done without a regard to order; for there is scarcely any mind so rich as to be entire master of every part of a considerable branch of science.

The style of didactic or argumentative compositions should in general be plain and simple. Something will however depend upon the na-

ture of the subject. In works on natural or experimental philosophy, or of deep reasoning upon any subject; where, in short, instruction is more the object than amusement, the style cannot be too simple. In moral and political treatises on the other hand, some scope may be allowed to the imagination, and they will even be the better for some ornament, provided the writer does not indulge in too florid a style. By simplicity I would not be understood to recommend inelegance. In the most simple style, perspicuity, purity, and even harmony, are as much to be regarded as in the most laboured and rhetorical, and perhaps more so. The style of an orator or declaimer may be compared to the full dress of a modern lady of taste and fashion; that of the philosopher should have all the neatness of a young and beautiful quaker.

LETTER XVI.

Oratory.—Parts of an Oration.

MY DEAR JOHN,

ORATORICAL compositions might have been comprehended under the preceding division, for they are in general either didactic or argumentative. But the form and style of orations; their intention and object, which is an address in part, at least, to the passions, have, from the first cultivation of letters, placed them in a distinct class; and this division may, as I before intimated, be allowed to include many political declamations, which have not been spoken, and even some compositions on more serious subjects, but which in their style and manner partake more of oratory than of any other art or science.

What has been already observed respecting the synthetical and analytical modes of exposition will also apply to rhetorical compositions; but in these last the directions of critics are ra-

ther more minute, as they divide every oration into parts, and the detail and explanation of these will serve in some measure to aid you in what I mentioned as not the least difficult part of composition, the arrangement.

The most antient writers on rhetoric and oratory have agreed in dividing an oration or discourse into five parts.

1st. The exordium, or introduction.

2d. The narrative (*narratio*) or what we should in modern language call a statement of the facts.

3. The division of the arguments.

4th. The argumentative, which is generally the most important part of a discourse.

5th. The peroration, or conclusion.

This order or arrangement one of the fathers of the art affirms to be the very order of nature.

“ This mode of addressing an audience (says he) is dictated by nature herself; that we should say something introductory, that we should next explain the subject, that we should proceed to the proof or argument, either in confirmation of our own allegation, or in refuting what our adversary urges to the contrary; lastly, that we should conclude by a *perora-*

tion;”* the meaning of which last word implies that it should be something conciliatory.

To these Dr. Blair adds, before the peroration “the pathetic parts;” but this arrangement seems chiefly applicable to a sermon. It has been represented as a trick with some popular preachers to say something pathetic immediately before the conclusion of their sermon to make the audience weep; but such orators, if indeed they are orators, are not to be imitated. When a person remarked to Swift that a sermon which they had just heard “was very moving,” he replied, “Yes, I am sorry for it, for the man is my friend.”

But I have a more general reason for rejecting this arrangement of Dr. Blair. The pathetic is a *quality* rather than a part of a discourse, and it may be applicable to any part, frequently to the narrative as much as any other, though I will admit that it is introduced with most effect towards the conclusion, for the

* “Ut aliquid ante rem dicamus, deinde ut rem exponamus; post ut eam probemus, nostris præsiis confirmandis, contrariis refutandis; deinde ut concludamus, atque ita peroremus. Hoc dicendi genus natura ipsa præscribit.”—DE. OR. 1. 3, c. 13.

orator should seem to warm as he advances ; but still to prescribe that whatever is pathetic in an oration should be introduced in a particular place, would be to bind genius down to mechanical rules ; and what an audience always expected would soon cease to have effect.

It will not be necessary to be very diffuse in treating of the several parts of an oration. I shall therefore proceed in the order I have laid down, and first to the *exordium*.

This part of every discourse, as Cicero observes, is certainly founded on nature and common sense. Was any man to address his superior, whom he did not know, he would not begin his suit abruptly, without knowing whether the party addressed was well affected to him, but would endeavour first to render him propitious to what he was going to advance. Thus, in the beginning of an oration, we should endeavour to render our hearers well disposed, both to the speaker and the subject.

The introduction, says Cicero, must make the hearers docile or tractable ; that is, it must render them attentive to what is to be said ; but if the subject is of sufficient importance to interest the hearers, or concerns them in a particular manner, it may sometimes be omitted.

The critics distinguish two kinds of introductions, one of which they call *principium*, and the other *insinuatio*. The first is a plain explanation of the orator's motives; the second is adopted when the judges are supposed to be not well affected towards the orator or his client, and then he must endeavour to remove all prejudices, in order that his discourse may have its full effect; of this kind we have an instance in Cicero's oration against Milo, and one still better in his oration against the Agrarian law.

An introduction, says Cicero, should not be taken from common-place topics, and such as may be applied with equal propriety to a number of different subjects; as that "a desire of happiness is the desire of all men." It should indeed be immediately connected with the subject, and lead, but not abruptly, to it. The beginning of the first letter of Junius I have always considered as a beautiful exordium.

"The submission of a free people to the executive authority of government, is no more than a compliance with laws, which they themselves have enacted. While the national honour is firmly maintained abroad, and while justice is impartially administered at home, the

obedience of the subject will be voluntary, chearful, and I might almost say unlimited. A generous nation is grateful even for the preservation of its rights, and willingly extends the respect due to the office of a good prince into an affection for his person. Loyalty, in the heart and understanding of an Englishman, is a rational attachment to the guardian of the laws. Prejudices and passion have sometimes carried it to a criminal length; and whatever foreigners may imagine, we know that Englishmen have erred as much in a mistaken zeal for particular persons and families, as they ever did in defence of what they thought most dear and interesting to themselves. It naturally fills us with resentment to see such a temper insulted and abused."

The style of an exordium should be clear and correct. At first an audience are generally attentive to the speaker, and when they are not warmed with the discourse or subject, are more disposed to criticism. All appearance of art or inflated language must then be avoided; for in an introduction nothing hurts more than ostentation. On this account an appearance of modesty has always been thought requisite in an

exordium.* Most men entertain too high an opinion of themselves to be pleased with those who assume any thing of an overbearing appearance; wherefore be cautious never to promise too much at first, for if your argument proves dull after you have raised expectation, the hearers will feel disappointment, and will consequently be displeased instead of conciliated. Every public speaker should bear in his mind the artful demeanour of the wise Ulysses in the contest with Ajax, as described in the 13th book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—

———— “ Donec Laertius heros

“ Adstitit; atque oculos paulum tellure moratos

“ Sustulit ad proceres; expectatoque resolvit

“ Ora sono: neque abest facundia gratia dictis,

“ Si mea cum vestris valuisset vota, Pelasgi,

“ Non foret ambiguus tanti certaminis hæres:

“ Tuque tuis armis, nos te potiremur, Achille!”

———— “ A murmur from the multitude,

“ Or somewhat like a stifled shout ensued—

“ Till from his seat arose Laertes' son,

“ Look'd down awhile, and paus'd ere he begun;

* “ Atque commendatio tacite si nos infirmos & impares, &c.—Est enim naturalis favor pro laborantibus; & Judex religiosus libentur patronem audit quem justiciæ suæ minimum timet.”—QUINCT. l. 4. c. 1.

“ Then to th’ expecting audience rais’d his look,
 “ And not without prepared attention spoke :
 “ Soft was his tone, and sober was his face ;
 “ Action his words, and words his action grace.
 “ If Heaven, great chiefs, had heard our common
 prayer,
 “ These arms had caused no quarrel for an heir,
 “ Still great Achilles had his own possess’d,
 “ And we with great Achilles had been bless’d”.

DRYDEN.

In your introduction never anticipate any thing that would be more properly introduced afterwards ; this takes away the grace of novelty, and the force of what should follow.

Lastly, The introduction should bear a proportion both in length and kind to the discourse. Dr. Blair remarks, that a long introduction before a short discourse is as improper as a large portico before a small house ; it must also be proportionate in kind, for as a finely adorned portico before a mean building, so is a flowery introduction to a flat discourse. Learned men have generally found the greatest difficulty in making introductions ; for it is not easy to be plain and simple without being somewhat dry and uninteresting.

The second part is the *narrative* or *explica*

tion. Narrative is chiefly necessary for popular assemblies, and for the bar, to state those circumstances which ought to be well understood. In sermons the word explication is used; it serves the same purpose as the narration, and in these is justly reckoned among the most difficult parts of a discourse.

In narration all superfluous circumstances must be omitted, and the best way is to represent things in a picturesque manner. Of this we have an excellent example in Swift's Essay on the Fates of Clergymen; the style should be simple but elegant. In a sermon the same rule must be observed. The explication should be clear, concise, and correct; the language plain but elegant. You must observe what light the context throws upon your discourse, and consider in what it differs from similar subjects.

The third part of a discourse is the statement or *division* of the argument. This generally follows the narrative, though sometimes it as properly goes before it. Some critics have been of opinion that a formal division of orations is unnecessary and improper, as it checks the passions, and breaks the unity of a discourse; but, in truth, it is only a faulty division that breaks

the unity : a proper division is not only consistent with unity, but even renders it more conspicuous. It also allows a resting-place to the mind, where it can reflect on what has been said, and look forward to what is to come : according to Quintilian, it is like a man traveling upon a road which is marked with stones at every mile end ; this makes his journey seem shorter than if he was always uncertain how far he had to go. It however depends upon the occasion, the subject, and the taste of the orator, whether any formal division should be proposed or not. In cases where it is adopted the following rules are recommended by writers on rhetoric—

1st. In a good discourse the heads should be distinct, and none of them included in another.

2dly. The divisions should be ranged in their natural order ; you should first begin with the most simple, and then proceed to things of greater importance.

3dly. They should exhaust the subject, otherwise the division is imperfect. You must therefore consider into what parts or divisions the subject most naturally resolves itself.

4thly. The heads should be expressed in con-

cise terms ; you should avoid all circumlocutions. The setting forth of the main part of your subject in a concise manner enables the hearers to comprehend it more easily.

5thly. The heads ought not to be multiplied unnecessarily, as this enfeebles the discourse.

Fourth. The *argumentative* part is by far the most important, being really in itself the end and object for which every oration is framed. The antient orators have established two divisions under this head ; the one in which you adduce the proofs and evidence on your own side the question ; the other in which you meet and refute the objections of your adversary. Which of these ought to come first in an oration must depend upon circumstances. In general I should say that in an opening discourse, or in the first upon any question, as when a member introduces a motion in either house of parliament, he should first establish the proofs in his own favour, and then proceed to encounter whatever objections he might conceive likely to be urged against him. In a *reply*, on the contrary, he should first meet the objections of his adversary, and then proceed to establish his own argument.

To attempt to establish rules respecting this part of an oration, would be trifling with your understanding. The arguments must depend upon the nature of the case, and the genius of the orator. There are indeed no rules to produce a strong reasoner; this is beyond the reach of logic or of any other science; it must be the effect of nature and of study. The ancients, it is true, endeavoured to supply every deficiency of argument by common-place topics, such as I formerly mentioned, to be used according to the nature of the discourse; these were called *loci*, and hence orations were classed into the demonstrative, the deliberative, and the judicial. Under the first they considered all the qualities that could attend any person from his birth to his death, for which he could be praised or blamed. Under the second they considered the honesty, propriety, &c. of an action. Under the third they arranged all arguments concerning the relations, accidents, and consequences of things. I am far, however, from thinking these sufficient for all the purposes of an orator, or that they can be suited to the circumstances of every subject. This method may produce declaimers, but can never

form a good orator; they may, however, be consulted with advantage, especially by lawyers; and you will find them in Aristotle, Cicero in his book *De Inventione*, his *Topica*, the 2d *De Oratore*, and *Quintilian*. Any person who inclines to see them in English may consult *Dr. Ward's System of Oratory*.

The arrangement of your arguments must also depend upon the subject, the audience and the object to be achieved, and must be altogether under the regulation of your own taste and judgment. You will pursue the analytical or synthetical method according to circumstances. In other respects the following instructions may be useful:

1st. When you prepare the argumentative part of your discourse, place yourself in the situation of a hearer, and consider what arguments would have the greatest effect in convincing yourself. As human nature is every where much the same, so it is most probable these arguments will have much the same effect on others.

2d. You must never rest satisfied with pleasing your audience; they may be pleased when they are persuaded there is not a sentence of

truth in your oration. In this part therefore of the discourse the speaker should particularly labour to convince, and reserve the entertaining part for the peroration.

3dly. The topics of your discourse should never be blended in a confused manner; this is so evident that the mention of it is sufficient.

4thly. Your arguments should be so arranged as to support each other; if you are doubtful of your cause, and have but one argument of any strength, place that one in the front, and enlarge upon it, in order to prejudice your hearers in your favour; for if you begin with those that have but little or no force, they will immediately conclude that your reasoning is weak and feeble; but if your subject is clear, and your case a good one, commence with those arguments that are more feeble, and make them grow in strength, or, in technical language, rise in a climax; if you have any circumstances which seem trifling, but which yet cannot be conveniently omitted, Cicero judiciously advises to put them in the middle, where they will be least observed; when your arguments are all weak and feeble, the best way is to take them in a mass, as they will be more

strong than when they are separate ; but if they are clear and convincing, it is best to take them separately, that each of them may appear in its clearest light, and have its full effect.

5thly. Never extend an argument to too great a length ; this only burdens the memory without influencing the judgment ; it takes from the *vis* and *acumen*, which is the best characteristic of talent ; and rather let your hearers suppose that something is left to their own fancy and judgment, than that you have entirely exhausted the subject.

The last part of an oration is the *peroration* or conclusion. This, like all the others, will vary according to the subject, the circumstances, and the genius of the speaker. The best in general, the most useful, and at the same time most common, is a short and forcible recapitulation of the principal arguments, with the inference which the speaker intended to be deduced from them. Men of genius will however by no means confine themselves to this one description of peroration. The vivacity of their imaginations will, as frequently as the circumstances of the case, induce them to take a different course. If an appeal can in this

part of the oration be made to the passions of the audience, it seldom fails of a happy effect. But the subject should completely authorize it, for nothing is more truly disgusting than affected pathos; and it should not be abruptly introduced, but should be a continuation of something of the same description which preceded. Bishop Sherlock is very happy in his perorations; and I do not know a finer passage than that which is quoted by Bishop Lowth in his Grammar, and afterwards by Dr. Blair, as an example of the *prosopopœia*—"Go to your natural religion," &c.

Dr. Ogden has also displayed a happy talent in this as well as in every branch of the rhetorical art. I transcribe almost at random the conclusion of his thirteenth sermon on the Articles of the Christian Faith.

"Let this suffice. Embrace the offer of life; fly from the wrath to come. You know not the plan of infinite government, what the order of God's universe admits, what eternal wisdom counsels, or supreme rectitude requires. Say not within yourselves, If he desires that I should be happy, he can make me so. He can do every thing that is right and fit to be done;

and nothing more. He desires you to be happy, and it is therefore he does so much, and, for any thing you know, all he can do, to effect it. He is your friend and your father: but, in this respect, like your parents upon earth; he can only lament over your calamities, if you resist his goodness, and are resolved to perish in spite of all the efforts of omnipotence.

“ For your own sake, and for the sake of those who love you, not only on earth, but above, the blessed angels, the Holy Trinity, return to yourself, to a sound mind, to the exercise of piety, and the practice of all virtue: there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.”

I cannot however give you a finer instance of a spirited peroration, than the conclusion of Mr. Burke's address on the hustings at Bristol, when he declined the election in 1780, and with this I shall conclude my letter; only adding one observation, that the short address from which it is extracted is one of the most precious specimens of eloquence that antient or modern times have recorded—

“ It has been usual for a candidate who de

clines, to take his leave by a letter to the sheriffs; but I received your trust in the face of day, and in the face of day I accept your dismissal. I am not—I am not at all ashamed to look upon you; nor can my presence discompose the order of business here. I humbly and respectfully take my leave of the sheriffs, the candidates, and the electors, wishing heartily that the choice may be for the best, at a time which calls, if ever time did call, for the service that is not nominal. It is no plaything you are about. I tremble when I consider the trust I have presumed to ask. I confided perhaps too much in my intentions. They were really fair and upright; and I am bold to say, that I ask no ill thing for you, when, on parting from this place, I pray, that whoever you choose to succeed me, may resemble me exactly in all things, excepting my abilities to serve, and my fortune to please you.”

LETTER XVII.

Different kinds of Oratory.—Eloquence of the Senate.—Of the Bar.

MY DEAR JOHN,

ALL orations may be arranged under two divisions. 1st. Those which are precomposed, and delivered either from memory, or read aloud to the audience; and 2dly, those which are spoken on the occasion, with little of previous study, at least with respect to the style or language, and this kind of eloquence is what we call extempore.

We have reason to believe that the most finished orations of the antients were precomposed, and committed to memory. We have the frank acknowledgment of Pliny the younger, that their ornamental eloquence, their panegyrics, come under this description; and we find from the same authority, that it was even common to read them, previous to their delivery, to a select company of friends, for the

benefit of their criticisms. The confession of Cicero* that, he had by him a volume of Exordiums ready precomposed, from which he was accustomed to select, leads me to suspect that many of his orations were in the same predicament. If I am not mistaken, the pleadings before the French parliament were always precomposed, and read by the advocates. The form of their trials, in which the evidence was all reduced to writing, and taken before notaries previous to the pleading before the court, entirely favoured this kind of eloquence. The French preachers also committed their sermons to memory; and I have been assured that in the national assembly, and the convention, many, even of the first orators, either read their speeches or delivered them from memory.

A modern writer (Mr. Hume) has instituted a comparison between antient and modern eloquence, infinitely indeed to the disadvantage of the latter. I suspect he was scarcely sufficient master of the languages to read the antients with that kind of relish that results from familiarity, and therefore incautiously took their

* *Ad Atticum*, lib. xvi. *ess.* 6.

praises at second hand; and I am also inclined to believe that he had not heard the best effusions of our senatorial oratory. That he had never stood before the glorious torrent of Lord Chatham's eloquence, or witnessed the varied and enchanting flow of Mr. Burke's incomparable genius.

Granting however for the present Mr. Hume's conclusion to be just, there are many reasons why the exertions of antient genius should be almost exclusively directed to oratory. The art of printing had not given that facility to the diffusion of sentiment, which at present exists. It was by oral effusions alone that the antients could hope to arrive at fame and distinction. Their philosophers taught in this manner, and their statesmen openly deliberated in public assemblies. Even the history of Herodotus was recited at the Olympic games. The occasions too for the employment of eloquence were more frequent than with us. Every citizen of the free states of antiquity might address the assembly of the people upon any public occasion. The law was not a laborious study exclusively confined to those who are educated to the profession; and, as justice was ad-

ministered generally on the vague and simple principles of natural equity, not according to forms, statutes, and precedents, any man might in a little time become completely acquainted with all that was necessary to accomplish him for a pleader. The science of the antients too was neither extensive nor profound, so that genius was not distracted by a variety of pursuits. From all these circumstances we cannot wonder that oratory was cultivated in the antient world with ardour and success.

But indeed I cannot in honesty and candour subscribe to the truth of Mr. Hume's position, that the antients were every thing, and that we are nothing in this art. Whether the antients excelled or not in extempore speaking, this at least we know, that the specimens of their eloquence which have been transmitted to us are studied compositions. Now to compare these with any unpremeditated effusion which we may happen to hear in the British senate, is scarcely fair; and yet I declare I have heard speeches there which would not lose in a comparison with the best of Cicero or Demosthenes. The vehement and impressive oratory of Mr. Fox, the wit and pathos of Mr. Sheridan; and

the choice and polished elocution of Mr. Pitt, might vie with any thing to be found in these celebrated models of eloquence.

But we have even a fairer and more certain criterion. Let any unprejudiced critic compare those specimens which the masters of eloquence among ourselves have condescended to publish, with the productions of the antients, and let him determine for himself. I protest I find more genius and fancy, more knowledge of human nature, and a far greater proportion of wit, in the published speeches of Mr. Burke, than in any of the works of the antient orators; and if chaste and correct eloquence is what he requires, I can only advise him to hear the present Chancellor of the Exchequer,* even when he speaks without premeditation; or to peruse a speech which was published some years ago by himself, or some of his friends, on the abolition of the slave trade.

I am not wishing to depreciate the antients, who certainly have cultivated eloquence with a success which could scarcely have been expected at so early a period; but I cannot endure

* This was written during Mr. Pitt's administration.

that the merit of the moderns should be wantonly underrated, through a blind veneration for the excellent of former times. Rely upon it, there is no theatre more favourable for the exertions of eloquence than a British house of commons, nor any, where it has been more successfully studied or employed.

The occasions, as I have just mentioned, were more frequent, for the exertion of eloquence, among the antients than among ourselves. Except a particular opportunity which a public meeting of the people may casually present, the only theatres of oratory are the parliament, the bar, and the pulpit. In the two former the orations are chiefly, if not altogether, extempore. In the latter the practice is at present almost exclusively confined to studied compositions.

In the remainder of this letter I shall endeavour to propose a few rules for parliamentary eloquence, and I shall also briefly consider the eloquence of the bar, which will include all that is to be offered on the subject of extempore oratory.

1st. I should be sorry to discourage any

young man of genius from attempting to speak in parliament; but to use a parliamentary phrase, I would caution him against “committing himself” too soon. A laugh once raised against a modest man perhaps disarms him for ever. Yet a young member must not be too fastidious. Mr. Gibbon, when he first entered the house of commons undoubtedly intended to speak; and I cannot doubt but if he could have subdued the first impulse of modesty, he would have spoken incomparably; but the fact was, that waiting too long for a fit occasion to display his talents, he sunk into utter indolence or despair; and thus the senate of Great Britain was deprived of a genius, which would probably have been its brightest ornament. Dr. Johnson (who was indeed an older man) felt more confidence in himself, and regretted that Lord North, at the solicitation of Mr. Thrale, had not afforded him an opportunity of displaying his talents. I have not a doubt but he would have acquitted himself admirably; for the style of Dr. Johnson in conversation was as pointed, and nearly as correct as in his publications. Lord Chesterfield, who knew mankind, and the houses of parliament in particu-

lar, better than most men, advises his son to *feel his way*; to make short speeches at first, and principally in committees, where formal speeches are not expected; and thus to acquire confidence by degrees, before he launched out on any great or momentous occasion.

2dly. A young member of parliament should endeavour to make himself well acquainted with every subject which is likely to come under discussion; and if his mind is full upon the question, it is very likely he will feel a momentary impulse to enter into the debate, especially if any pause should take place. At all events, by studying diligently the different topics of debate, he enables himself to discharge his duty properly if he gives only a silent vote, and is accomplishing his mind for future occasions.

3dly. It is practice that makes a fluent orator. Practice cannot give genius, it is true; but (if I may be allowed a vulgarism) there is a ready *knack*, both of writing and speaking, which men of very moderate talents often and easily acquire. Debating societies have their disadvantages, and there are two in particular against which young men ought to be guarded. They are apt to generate a love of disputing,

the most disagreeable quality, without exception, with which a young man can enter society. The applause also which superficial speakers receive there, is apt to generate a belief that a command of words is the only necessary accomplishment. Otherwise by affording an opportunity of practice, debating societies certainly contribute more than any means I know of towards fluency and readiness, which are no mean qualifications in an orator. But it is only to a mind which is well stocked with useful knowledge that they will afford this improvement. The person who goes ignorant into one of these seminaries, unless he compensates by ardent study for his former deficiencies, will come out, under the most favourable circumstances, only a noisy and fluent dunce.

4thly. Any man before he rises to speak in a popular assembly should have formed a complete plan of his intended discourse; whether in speaking he adopts divisions or not, he will find his memory greatly assisted by dividing in his mind his intended harangue into its several parts, and methodically arranging them. I have seen the first of our parliamentary orators

have in their hands little memorandums, which I could perceive contained the heads of their discourses. In a reply the proper arrangement is always to follow the course of your adversary's argument; and hence those speakers who are not great masters of method and arrangement, often shine more in a reply than in an opening speech. I am far from advising that you should study the words or phrases you are to employ before-hand, this would only serve to confuse and embarrass you. The language of an orator must be strictly *his own*, such as in general he would employ upon ordinary occasions, but as select as the rapidity of utterance will allow.

5thly. In the course of an oration never hesitate about the choice of a word. Take that which presents itself rather than look for terms more uncommon and refined; for if the mind is once diverted from the matter to the words, your discourse will be deranged, and fail in a lucid order, which is a greater deficiency than an indifferent style; and it is also probable that even your enunciation will be perplexed and stammering.

6thly. From the two preceding rules you will

easily perceive of what immense importance it is to an orator to accustom himself even in common conversation to polished language, and a very nice choice of expression. He must never permit himself to use a vulgarism on the most common occasion, but must carefully eradicate all such noxious weeds from his vocabulary. A little attention to this chastity and correctness of expression will soon render it easy and habitual. No other words but the best will present themselves to your mind ; and on the contrary, I am convinced that unless a man has previously cleared his usual dialect from low and vicious expressions, they will obtrude themselves whenever he speaks in public, whatever may be his caution and attention.

In treating thus of extempore oratory, as far as applies to the eloquence of the senate, I have anticipated much of what I should otherwise have had to advance on that of the bar, for the same rules will apply to both, and I shall only have to add one or two remarks exclusively applicable to the latter.

I am far from agreeing with Mr. Hume and Dr. Blair, that the English bar affords not a fine theatre for oratory. They certainly, in

forming this conclusion, reasoned under some disadvantage, for they had only before their view the Scottish bar, where the trial by jury is allowed only in criminal cases. The observation of Dr. Blair is therefore perfectly just in this case. "Speakers at the bar," says he, "address themselves to one or a few judges, and those too, persons generally of age, gravity, and authority of character. There they have not those advantages which a mixed and numerous assembly affords for employing all the arts of speech." This is strictly true from the view which presented itself to this writer; but in England, where in three of the principal courts, as well as in all the inferior judicatures of the kingdom, almost every cause is tried by a jury of twelve men, selected by ballot, surely the very finest opportunity for the display of oratory is afforded, and especially as the advocate addresses them under peculiar advantages, with some ideas of superior learning and superior dignity.

The English advocate too has conducted the cause from its commencement, and examined the evidence; he is therefore not only made master of the whole argument, but, if possessed of

feeling, must have acquired some warmth and ardour in the cause. Grant that he is in some degree confined by the precision of our laws, still it is matter of fact on which he has principally to address a jury, and the less of technical language he mingles in it the greater will be its effect. It would indeed perhaps be better if oratory had less influence than it is known to have in our courts of justice. It is somewhat checked by the sedate character of the people of England, and by the feeling of jurymen that they are bound by their oaths; but still it is found to be of so much intrinsic consequence, that the barrister who possesses this talent finds that it infallibly conducts to fame and fortune.

1st. The most important rule that I can lay down to the practitioner at the bar, is to make himself perfect master of the science of the law. Without this he can never speak with courage and confidence; and he will also be in danger of incurring the ridicule of his adversary, and perhaps the contempt of the court. A knowledge of the law will also supply the means of eloquence, or at least a substitute for it; for a

sound lawyer is always heard with attention, whether he is what is called eloquent or not.

2d. The next requisite is a perfect knowledge of the cause in which he is engaged. This is indeed a duty he owes not less to his client than to his own reputation, for he actually defrauds the man from whom he receives a fee, unless he exerts himself to the very utmost of his ability.

3dly. Though warmth and vehemence may be occasionally admitted, and sometimes required, yet a counsel will commonly have most weight with a jury, who addresses them as rational beings, and *seems* at least to labour to convince their judgment. In the beginning of his oration he should always appear cool and temperate, but always in earnest, otherwise they will have less confidence in his assertions.

The plan and order which I laid down in my last letter is strictly applicable to judicial oratory, and every address to a jury must consist of; 1st, an exordium, in which he must endeavour to conciliate their favour; 2d, a statement of facts or narrative, in which the pleader recapitulates or anticipates the principal parts of

the evidence ; 3dly, it will be in general better and clearer to a jury, if he points out the proper divisions of his argument, as more of method is expected from a pleader than in a mere declamatory address ; 4thly, the argumentative part is indispensable, that being the peculiar business of an advocate ; 5thly, the peroration or conclusion should be always remarkably clear and lucid, and if the subject admits of the pathetic, this is the part in which it will commonly be introduced to the greatest advantage.

LETTER XVIII.

Rise and progress of Eloquence.

MY DEAR JOHN,

IT would be a very pleasing exercise to trace the history of eloquence from its first rude origin through the various ramifications of human genius; to mark the powers, the character of the different men in the different ages of society, who have successfully employed this fascinating art. It would be pleasing even to pursue the science as long as the records of civilized man permit; and to trace the progress of oratory from Pericles to Pitt. But our materials for such a critical investigation are very few. The best effusions of oratory are *Ἔπεα πτερόεντα* (winged words). Unfortunately for us they are not

“ Congealed in northern air.”

Not only we lose the music, the cadence, the action with which they were graced, but even

the substance of very few of these productions are transmitted to us. Of the orations of Demosthenes, a very small number have outlived the depredations of time. Cicero, who for some years spoke almost daily in public, and who was the most diligent of men, has committed to writing a very small proportion of his numerous orations; even the eloquence of our own great and distinguished orators, St. John, Pulteney, Pitt, Fox, and Sheridan, are only to be traced in those meagre and imperfect registers, the volumes of Parliamentary Debates, in which you are presented rather with the language of an illiterate reporter, than with that of the accomplished statesman and orator, whose speech he undertakes to detail.

That oratory was not only practised, but studied with considerable effect from almost the earliest periods, is evident from the specimens which stand recorded almost as soon as language became stationary in writing. The oratory of the Hebrews is of a peculiar kind, short and sententious, like their poetry. But in the Book of Job, in the speeches of Moses and of Samuel, we have some beautiful examples of the sublime and the pathetic in oratory. The

speeches in Homer would be admired even if they were not in measure; and I am inclined to the opinion that the Iliad is not less indebted for its celebrity to the eloquence than to the poetry it contains. This, it will be said, was the work of the poet only, and is neither to be ascribed to the characters from whose mouths it is supposed to issue, nor to the period in which they existed. This I will readily grant; but as the Iliad is universally acknowledged to be a minor, or dramatic representation of the age at least in which the poet lived, two inferences will necessarily follow—That it was *then* customary to address public assemblies in the manner of the heroes of Homer; and that no inconsiderable progress must have been made in eloquence as an art. In truth, I do not know any production that a young rhetorician may study with more profit than the oratorical parts of Homer, and particularly the debate of the contending chieftains in the first book of the Iliad.

From the time of Homer to that of Pericles, we have however nothing like a regular and authentic oration on record. That the eloquence of Pericles was unrivalled we cannot doubt, for it is asserted that he governed Athens (and he

governed it almost despotically) not less by his eloquence, than by his policy and power. Yet we dare not pronounce that the charming specimens of the eloquence of this great man to be found in Thucydides are genuine. I apprehend them myself to be the fabrication of the historian; for they carry with them decidedly the marks of his peculiar style.

But though we have not any oratorical productions of this period before us, we know that immediately after the time of Pericles, the art of oratory was publicly professed and taught. It was reduced to a method almost mechanical. For the *topics* or *common places*, which I have so frequently mentioned, were introduced at this period; and these masters in rhetoric pretended to be able to make any person an orator by pursuing a certain course of study. Gorgias of Leontium accumulated an immense fortune by teaching rhetoric, but we have only a short fragment of his preserved by Hermogenes. It would be unfair, from so slight a specimen, to decide on an author's character; but as far as we may judge from it, his reputation was higher than his merits.

About the same period, it appears, there arose

at Athens a set of men, who, having applied themselves to oratory, made a profession of it as public pleaders or orators. Lysias was one of these, and appears to have been a lawyer by profession, though some have asserted that he only composed orations for those who were practising lawyers. His eloquence is therefore almost exclusively forensic. Thirty-four of his orations are transmitted to us; they are acute, clear and methodical; no bad models for a practitioner at the bar, if we did not enjoy the advantage of hearing better almost every day in Westminster-hall.

Isocrates, of whose orations there are twenty-one extant, was somewhat posterior to Lysias. He was a professed rhetorician; and his productions are indeed rather to be considered as essays than orations. When I read them as a young man I was delighted with them, they abound so much in sentiment and moral observation. In more mature age, however, I found the latter exceedingly trite, and the whole too studied and artificial. The style appears, as far as we are judges of style in a dead language, to be very chaste, though not animated. Isocrates is said to have been the first who studied a

musical cadence, and has brought it to great perfection. He was so nice in this particular, that he spent no less than ten years in composing one oration, still extant, the Panegyric. Cicero was a great admirer of Isocrates, and seems to have imitated him.

Isæus (ten of whose orations are still extant) was master to Demosthenes, who, by the assistance of a surprising genius, united with indefatigable labour and industry, made so much advantage of his precepts, that he has always been esteemed, by the best judges, the first of Grecian orators. I need not repeat to you the common tale, that he retired into caves, that he might study without being disturbed, and that he kept pebbles in his mouth to correct a defect in his speech. He is said also to have hung a naked sword over his shoulders, to prevent him from using an ungraceful motion, to which he had habituated himself. From this we learn how much natural disadvantages may be balanced by diligent application and study; and it is a proof also how ardently oratory was studied at this period in the Grecian republics.

I never did enter into the very exaggerated praises which have been bestowed upon De-

mosthenes, and which have exalted him into something more than a man. Yet it would be uncandid and unjust not to confess that in his person oratory was carried to a very high degree of perfection, especially when we consider the early period at which he flourished. The power which he attained, and the situation which he occupied in the state of Athens, prove him to have been possessed of no uncommon force in persuading and guiding a popular assembly. But it is fortunate that we have still superior evidence to which to resort; we have his own written orations. They are to be criticised as studied compositions, since they are not pretended to have been taken down as he spoke them, but were made public by himself. Demosthenes, therefore, arguing from the specimens he has left us, must be regarded as a close and correct reasoner, master of a flowing, elegant, and harmonious style, as far as we are judges of these qualities in a dead language; and with occasionally a very fine and brilliant thought, though in this he is inferior to many of the moderns, and particularly to Mr. Burke. He had but little of wit, though he occasionally affects it, particularly in the celebrated oration

against *Æschines*. One excellence however I cannot too much commend in *Demosthenes*, nor can I in this respect too strongly recommend his example to young orators. His arguments all tend to a single point, and are concentrated, like the dispersed rays of light when reflected from a concave mirror, so as to bear altogether with their united force upon the object he has in view. He never excurses into too large a field, never loses sight of his subject. This, I think, was the characteristic excellence of *Mr. Fox's* oratory. Other speakers greatly excelled *Mr. Fox* in choice of words, in voice, address and manner; but no man equalled him in the selection, force, and happy arrangement of his arguments.

Cicero, who is the only orator of antiquity who will bear a comparison with *Demosthenes*, and who perhaps possessed more genius, at least more imagination, was more diffuse, and consequently feebler than his Grecian rival. I think *Quintilian*, in his celebrated comparison between *Cicero* and *Demosthenes*, says, "to the one nothing can be added, from the other nothing can be taken away." The latter character, which applies strictly to *Demosthenes*,

you will easily perceive implies more judgment in him, and speaks him the more forcible orator; such indeed he must have been, though the beauties of Cicero, when separately considered, will perhaps attract the highest admiration.

Though so accomplished an orator, Demosthenes was certainly a very bad general, and not a much better politician. He had moreover the misfortune never to be obeyed by his versatile countrymen but when he happened to give bad advice; and the jarring and inconsistent councils of a discordant republic, soon gave way before the persevering and steady policy of Philip of Macedon. With Demosthenes, therefore, fell the liberties of his country, and with him perished the eloquence of Greece. Those who succeeded were a race of sophists, and pedantic rhetoricians, who taught the art merely in the schools, and never introduced it (indeed they never had an opportunity after their country was enslaved) upon great or public questions.

Oratory was however studied as a fine art, under these masters, long after it ceased to be useful in Greece; and even the Romans, when

they became civilized, and applied to literature, regarded rhetoric as one of the most important lessons to which they could attend under their more polished teachers of Greece.

There never was a finer field for eloquence than was opened at Rome. Her government was popular; her judicature popular. With oratory their statesmen influenced the senate; with a public harangue their generals led on their armies to battle and to conquest. I cannot therefore believe, with the French critics and Dr. Blair, that they were greatly inferior in this art to their Grecian rivals.

The Romans, it is true, were a military nation; but though this circumstance is but little favourable to the cultivation of the more profound sciences, can a nobler scope be afforded for that manly and energetic eloquence, which great projects and great undertakings naturally dictate? It might want something of that elegance and polish which Greece, where every pleasing and ornamental art was known to flourish, could boast. Their manner of speaking might be, to use the words of Cicero, somewhat "asperum & horridum;" but can it be believed that it was deficient in dignity, and in

vigour? I am not prepared therefore to subscribe to the opinion that Cicero was the only orator that Rome could boast. I shall not quote, as authentic documents, the orations which are found in Livy; but if we may judge from the effects, the orations of the Gracchi must have been exceedingly powerful. Scipio appears to have been not less of an orator than a soldier. The two Cato's might not be polished speakers, but they certainly commanded attention in the senate. With respect to Cæsar, Hortensius, and even Anthony, we have the testimony of Cicero himself, and after such an authority we have no right to think meanly of their talents.

After the accession of Augustus, there was scarcely any thing deserving of the name of eloquence in that poor shadow of popular authority, which was called the senate of Rome. The few specimens which are extant, evince that the history of Rome, under the emperors, consisted chiefly of studied panegyrics, or orations on state occasions, like the declamations of the French academy, which nobody reads. They might be indeed sufficiently ornamented and polished; but they want interest, because

we know they were mere artificial compositions, without a relation to any great undertaking or transaction of public life. The best specimen extant of these, is the panegyric of the younger Pliny on the Emperor Trajan.

We have also some examples extant of that kind of eloquence which was taught in the schools of rhetoric, particularly the *Controversiæ*, as they are called, of Seneca the rhetorician, the father of the famous philosopher of that name. They are altogether artificial, full of antitheses and studied ornament. Yet much as I admire the genius of Dr. Johnson, whoever looks into these orations, will find that our great writer was not unacquainted with the *Controversiæ* of Seneca.

After the preaching of christianity a new style of oratory was introduced, of the highest importance as to the subject, but less animated than the eloquence of debate, because of a more didactic nature. The Epistles of Paul, however, and even some of the later Fathers, contain specimens of eloquence superior to any, I will affirm, to be found in the compositions of either Cicero or Demosthenes.

A late French writer, the unfortunate Mar-

quis de Condorcet, in a posthumous work, affects to speak lightly of the writings of the Fathers. His remarks, however, only prove his ignorance, and shew that, like the rest of his superficial and contemptible sect, he had the effrontery to censure writings that he never read. They shew that he has never perused the sweet and flowing orations of Chrysostom;* the animated addresses of Gregory Nazianzen; the unequal, but sometimes sublime compositions of St. Augustine; the strong and nervous periods of Tertullian; and of Lactantius, who abounds in all the learning of the times, and in every beauty of composition. The criticisms even of Dr. Blair, on these writers, prove that he was not much more conversant with them than Condorcet himself. It is, perhaps, sufficient to say, that the most eloquent preacher of the present times confessedly formed his style altogether on that of the antient Fathers.

The only countries in modern Europe where we can expect to find eloquence cultivated are France and England. The French have naturally a sprightly genius, and a taste, though not a correct one, for the polite arts. The Eng-

* The golden-mouthed.

ish have had a great advantage, both from their genius and the nature of their government ; they have both however produced very great men in many different professions, and some orators who might justly contend with either Demosthenes or Cicero.

In England, however, as well as in Greece and Rome, the highest efforts of eloquence seem confined to the great assembly of the nation. There are, no doubt, some good speakers who plead at the bar, but none of their orations are transmitted to posterity, while we read those of the antients with pleasure. The sermons of the English writers are inferior to none in good sense and reasoning, but they appear in general, deficient in spirit and animation.

In the writings of Bossuet, Bourdaloue, and Masillon, we see a much higher kind of eloquence aimed at than by any English preacher ; but these are as lamentably deficient in matter as the English are in style ; and, if we except a few sermons of Masillon, there are not many of them of much value.

I shall conclude this letter with a short comparison between two of the most finished orators that ever graced the British or any other senate.

It was written several years ago, when I was in the habit of attending the debates of the house of commons, and was originally published in a periodical publication, in the conducting of which I had some share.

“ Both Mr. Pitt and Mr. Fox are strictly what may be termed business speakers. They argue like men of business, rather with a view of influencing their hearers, than of conciliating applause to themselves. They vary less from the question, and indulge their imaginations less than Mr. Burke or Mr. Sheridan; and the superior force of their eloquence is the best panegyric on this species of oratory. Though agreeing in this one essential, the oratory of these great men is however in a variety of circumstances materially different. A brief comparison, therefore, of their excellencies and defects, whether instructive or not, cannot, I think, fail to prove entertaining, at least to country readers.

“ The first obvious difference which excited my attention was, that the one is the most elegant, the other the most impassioned speaker I have ever heard. The one carries the understanding along with him, and while we are the

captives of his ingenuity, we imagine we are following the light of our own reason ; the other leads us no less forcibly by our passions ; and if Mr. Pitt addresses the head, every sentence of Mr. Fox demonstrates his influence over the heart. The one interests, the other convinces. The one conducts you over a pleasant champaign and luxuriant meadow ; the other forces you along with him, be the ground ever so uneven, be the path ever so rough and interrupted. It is something extraordinary that the younger man should be distinguished by the greater extent and variety of his knowledge—but such undoubtedly appears to be the fact ; and to account for it, we perhaps must have recourse to the different education and habits of the two orators. Thus Mr. Pitt is diffuse, and surprises by the multitude of his ideas, and by the variety of lights in which he exhibits the subject. Mr. Fox, on the other hand, is concise and energetic ; his proofs are arranged to the utmost advantage, and all of them tend immediately to the very point : he introduces but few arguments, few ideas, but these are generally the very strongest, and placed in the strongest light. In short, it is impossible to

hear the two speakers without recollecting the observation of Quintilian in his celebrated parallel between Cicero and Demosthenes: "To the one, nothing can be added; from the other, nothing can be taken away." But if it be granted, that from indolence, from the variety of his avocations, or perhaps from not possessing the means, Mr. Fox appears deficient of information on any occasion, what he wants in knowledge, he amply compensates for in ingenuity. He catches almost instantaneously the slightest hint, and an argument which appears of no force when treated by a minor speaker, in his hands appears both interesting and important. Mr. Pitt generally comes well prepared to speak upon the business of the day: to Mr. Fox, preparation seems unnecessary, since even from the casual intimation of his adversaries, he is able to produce matter sufficient, either for attack or defence.

"I have intimated that neither of them are very florid speakers; and I cannot help thinking it rather an extraordinary circumstance, in Mr. Pitt particularly, that though fresh from the schools, we find in his speeches no classical allusions, no embellishments from antient li-

terature, no pomp of erudition; he seldom quotes, but rather produces the ideas of other men in his own words, contrary to the fashionable practice of cloathing our own thoughts in the peculiar phraseology of books. In point of wit, I do not think either of them deficient, though they are prudent in the use of it. Mr. Fox seldom descends from the earnestness and dignity of his declamation to light or trivial remarks; and yet Mr. Pitt's oratory is not disgraced by that elegant irony, that polished ridicule, in which he sometimes indulges himself and his hearers. The candid of all parties agree in allowing to Mr. Pitt the happiest choice of words that graces any senator in either house; but I confess I was surprized to find the editor of *Bellendenenus* attribute, in unqualified terms, this excellence to Mr. Fox. The style of Mr. Pitt is in general so correct, that the auditor is almost induced to fancy he hears the studied composition of some masterly writer. The language of Mr. Fox is indeed generally forcible and expressive, but it is by no means so elegant, select, and harmonious, as that of his more finished rival. If fluency be a mark

of genius, in this too Mr. Pitt has the advantage. His words flow rapidly, but easily, without difficulty or hesitation; on the contrary, Mr. Fox frequently hesitates, sometimes recalls his words, and seems dubious which to make choice of; and though a very rapid speaker, his rapidity appears rather the effect of passion than imagination. With respect to manner, Mr. Pitt at first appears to have greatly the advantage; but Mr. Fox compensates in vivacity for his want of elegance, and though less graceful, is perhaps more interesting than Mr. Pitt. Mr. Pitt's voice is a full tenor, and his modulation is harmonious. Mr. Fox's is a treble, and his enunciation is affected by an occasional lisp. He soon teaches us, however, to forget these defects. His is both the language and the expression of nature, and without gratifying the eye, or charming the ear of his auditors, he commands their affections.

“ Such appears to me to be the general character of each of these distinguished speakers. I have seen each of them occasionally bear away the palm from his competitor, and I have observed each fall greatly below the standard

of his own merit, when defending a bad cause ; a decisive proof that ingenuity and command of words will not alone form an orator, but that there must be a good foundation of truth and argument ; or the most splendid harangue is but blossom without fruit ; a mere shadow of eloquence without substance or effect."

LETTER XIX.

Eloquence of the Pulpit.

MY DEAR JOHN,

IN this country there is only one department of eloquence which admits of a precomposed discourse, and that is the eloquence of the pulpit. I have formerly remarked that we have reason to believe the antients frequently, if not generally, composed their public orations before-hand, and recited them either from memory or from notes; and all those orations which were pronounced in the rhetorical schools, either as exercises, or displays of talent, were composed with great study and care. I have observed that the French advocates, before the Revolution, were also in the habit of committing all their pleadings to writing. But in our senate, and at our bar, where skilful debaters are of more value and weight than mere declaimers, where argument has more force

than ornament, such a practice would be ridiculed as formal and pedantic.

The practice therefore of precomposing a popular address, is with us confined almost exclusively to the pulpit. The principles which have been already advanced on the subject of didactic composition, and also relative to the parts of a discourse, will almost all apply to what is called a Sermon, which you see literally means a discourse, from the Latin *Sermo*.

Whatever there is peculiar to this form of composition will appear further, if we take a short view of the origin and progress of pulpit eloquence.

In the primitive church, from the earliest period, a custom prevailed, which may indeed be ultimately traced to the Jewish, though the time of its introduction into the latter is not clearly ascertained. One of the most distinguished members of the congregation (usually the bishop or presbyter) read a portion of scripture, selected for the service of the day, and proceeded with a general explanation or exposition of what had been read, concluding with a practical exhortation. These exhortations were brief and unadorned, and were some-

times followed by further expositions of Scripture from others of the society, who professed to speak under the influence of the Holy Spirit.*

It is probable that what at first consisted of a few short, and perhaps, unconnected sentences, would gradually, and by those who possessed fluency of thought, and facility of expression, be made to assume a more regular form. Origen (who lived in the beginning of the third century,) was the first who introduced long explanatory discourses into Christian assemblies; and preaching began in his time to be formed upon the nice model of Grecian eloquence. Sometimes two or three sermons were preached in the same congregation by the presbyters and bishops in succession. Many of these discourses were extempore, but many were also precomposed. The sermons on these occasions were necessarily short, as the time allotted for public worship was only two hours. It was probably upon some of these occasions that the short sermons of St. Augustin were composed, many of which may be pronounced distinctly

* Gregory's History of the Christian Church, Cent. I.

in eight minutes, and some in less. Those of Chrysostom are however much longer, and some of them are evidently laboured compositions. As the institution of preaching commenced in the explication of Scripture, it still retained, through many revolutions of the public taste, some respect to its origin; and, with a few exceptions, a portion of the sacred writings always constituted the basis of the discourse, though latterly it was reduced almost to the form of a motto, which had frequently little connexion with the principal subject; and hence have originated our modern *Essay Sermons*.

During the dark ages, from the ignorance of the clergy, preaching was almost laid aside. After the Reformation it was chiefly extempore; but in England many complaints were made of those who were licensed to preach, I presume on account of the doctrines they advanced; and to enable them to justify themselves, many of the clergy began to write and read their sermons. The ease which this practice afforded, and the correctness it induced, has continued it in the church of England ever since.

This short view of the origin and progress of

this species of eloquence will easily furnish us with the precise rules which are exclusively applicable to it.

That sermon is most useful and most agreeable to the nature of the institution which serves to elucidate the Holy Scriptures, and to clear away the difficulties which may occur to common readers. A sermon however ought always to have a practical tendency; and though explanatory of Scripture, the minuteness of philological or metaphysical speculations ought to be carefully avoided. Discourses which enter deeply into difficult doctrinal points are seldom of much use, and are fitter for the closet than for a public assembly. Sermons ought to be calculated to interest and engage as well as to instruct. "Propose one point in a discourse (says Mr. Paley) and stick to it; a hearer never carries away more than one impression." Let one virtue be recommended, or one doctrinal point be explained; it is impossible to condense the whole duties of a man, or the whole system of Christian doctrine into a single sermon.

A sermon should never wander from the text; and those are the best which follow exactly the

natural division of the text ; but this cannot always be done, particularly when the text is short, or contains one single proposition. A few easy and natural divisions will assist the memory, but many subdivisions perplex and confuse it ; the exordium should be always natural and easy, not affected, nor yet trite, and directly leading to the object of the discourse. The conclusion should be animated, and skilfully adapted to interest and awaken the feelings of the audience. It should therefore be always practical, and consist of an exhortation to make a right use of the doctrine which has been detailed, or to profit by the example which has been exhibited.

The style of sermons should be clear and plain. It should neither admit of low cant, nor vulgar phraseology ; nor yet of difficult or foreign words, such as Latinisms, or technical phrases of any kind, not even those appropriate to divinity as a science. Rhetorical flourishes, or metaphysical expressions, are of little use. As Mr. Paley remarks, “ they cost the writer much trouble, and produce small advantage to the hearer.” Above all faults of style the exclamation ought to be avoided: it is al-

ways frigid, and can scarcely fail to offend a sensible ear.

The delivery of a sermon should correspond with what I have just uttered with respect to the style. It should correspond with the gravity and the dignity of the character which is assumed by the preacher. Those who attempt to *act* their sermons, as Dr. Warburton expresses it, degrade themselves into buffoons. That violence and inequality of enunciation, which sometimes becomes a play, as expressive of the stronger passions he represents, is offensive and improper in a teacher. Nor less disgusting is the attempt to speak in a kind of recitative, begging, pathetic tone, without at all adapting the voice to the nature of the subject. Whoever employs these poor devices, will indeed excite the pity of the well-informed part of his audience—but it will be for the preacher himself.

An easy, temperate, and harmonious elocution (with some regard to emphasis, particularly where a peculiar phrase requires that it should be impressed upon the mind) will always be more generally pleasing, than any kind of affectation. Few can excel in the higher re-

quisites of oratory ; few can become orators ; but all may be correct and agreeable speakers (at least with few exceptions,) if they will not be too ambitious for distinction.

It has been debated, whether sermons may be most advantageously delivered from written notes, memory, or perfectly extempore. Dr. Beattie decides in favour of written sermons. Indeed there is scarcely any extempore discourse which is not too diffuse for the time usually allotted for the pulpit, that might not in fact be comprised in much fewer words, and which does not abound in impertinencies, tautologies, or solecisms. Yet a good extempore discourse has more effect in a common audience than a written one. A practice which has been much exclaimed against, but I think without reason, is that of preaching from printed sermons. If it does not beget habits of indolence in young clergymen, and is only the effect of modesty at their first entrance into public life, it is rather commendable than otherwise ; but they should be cautioned when they do pilfer, rather to take from approved writers, than from obscure, or old authors, as is frequently done to escape detection ; and it may be observed,

that he who is unqualified to compose is commonly unfitted to select.

The style of the French writers I do not, in general, admire ; they are, it is true, animated, while the English are rational and full of argument ; but both these should be united to form a perfect preacher. The French have but few thoughts, and these placed in a variety of lights, which renders them sometimes feeble, but they are, perhaps, more warm and persuasive. There are some protestant preachers of the French, and particularly Saurin, who may be read with advantage. Amongst their popish divines, Bourdaloue is the most admired in France, but he is sometimes dull and verbose. Flechier is more ornamental ; but the most distinguished is Masillon, bishop of Clermont, who is really an elegant and nervous writer, and one who well understood the human heart.

In England, before the Restoration, the preachers were much addicted to scholastic and casuistical theology, and abounded in divisions. After the Restoration they became more correct and rational ; but the puritans still retained something of the old style, united with a considerable share of enthusiasm. The oppo-

sition between them caused those of the establishment to run into the other extreme, and the majority of them became mere moral and insipid preachers.

There is however a great number of excellent sermons in our language. Among the old authors I prefer Jeremy Taylor. He is classical, pathetic, and, for the time he lived in, elegant in his style. English preaching was, however, but in its infancy at that period: he admits, therefore, many thoughts and allusions into his discourses, which would excite a stare, if not a smile, in a modern audience; and if any divine should wish to adopt them, he must have some confidence in his own taste, and some expertness in the art of abridging. Dr. Barrow possessed a more varied stock of learning than perhaps any divine of our church. He has written on almost every subject of divinity or ethics; and I know few books to which I would rather choose to refer the student of theology, than to his Sermons on the Christian Faith. Though his genius was mathematical, I confess there appears rather a want of method in some of his discourses. His style is in general plain and chaste. His periods are not full, but run

smoothly from the tongue ; and his language, for the most part, preserves one even tenor. He is a great magazine of sentiment and information, and may be resorted to by young preachers, with great advantage.

Dr. Tillotson's sermons have been admired. They are however, in general, too polemical, and the language is too loose and unharmonious. It has few well-turned periods, and is sometimes as slovenly as common conversation. The sermons of this good and learned man contain, however, some passages exquisitely beautiful.

I can, I confess, read South with more pleasure than the last mentioned author, though I do not pretend to apologize for his buffoonery. He is keen, pointed, sarcastic. He is a great judge of human nature, which he does not always view in the most favourable light. He is always animated, keeps alive our attention by the energy of his arguments, the acuteness of his wit, and the terseness and compression of his style. He seldom affects the pathetic, and never succeeds in it.

Bishop Atterbury is perhaps the most elegant and classical writer among our divines.

His discourses have all the flow and elegance of Cicero, with the chasteness and purity of Demosthenes. His style is animated, yet not too highly ornamented; and his allusions are original, classical, and splendid. The sermon on the character of the Scorners is as animated a philippic as any in the compass of the whole of the Roman oratory; that on Paul before Felix is admirably pathetic.

Some of Bishop Sherlock's are, in my opinion, among the very best and most interesting sermons in the English language. His knowledge of human nature is perhaps superior to that of all the preceding writers. His arrangement is correct and striking; his subjects well-chosen, his arguments forcible and ingenious. In general I think his doctrinal are inferior to his moral discourses.

Dr. Clarke's are curious and critical, and ought to be read by every divine; he is one of the best expositors of Scripture that I know. Dr. Jortin's are nearly of the same kind. They contain a fund of excellent matter, of keen remarks, and original thought. Both these writers are, however, rather curious than popular; and are rather to be considered as repositories of

matter, which may be occasionally resorted to, than as affording any discourses for immediate use.

The sermons of Seed, and those of Dr. Ogden, are both highly ornamented ; and yet the ornament is of a quite different kind. The style of the former is diffuse ; that of the latter is the most condensed I have ever examined. With respect to the time which these sermons would require in delivering, the former ought to be abridged, and the latter perhaps dilated ; but what modern architect dare lift up a trowel against the work of a Jones or a Palladio ?

The present age has produced some excellent sermons. The principal are Dr. Blair's, Mr. Hewlett's, and the present Bishop of London. Some of the first are better adapted to the closet than the pulpit ; but many of them contain admirable delineations of human character. The two last authors are too well known to be affected either by my commendation or dispraise, if indeed the latter could with any propriety be applied to them. I have heard it remarked that Dr. Blair's seem calculated for any time, and for almost any religion ; those of Bishop Porteous are adapted exactly to the

present time, and the present state of religion.

Should you wish for more information on this subject, you will find it in an Essay on the Composition and Delivery of a Sermon, prefixed to a volume of Sermons which I published some years ago; which you will conclude has furnished many of the hints for this letter; and in that you will find all the authorities for what I have advanced on the origin and progress of pulpit eloquence.

END OF VOL. I.

1870
The first of the year
The second of the year
The third of the year
The fourth of the year
The fifth of the year
The sixth of the year
The seventh of the year
The eighth of the year
The ninth of the year
The tenth of the year
The eleventh of the year
The twelfth of the year





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